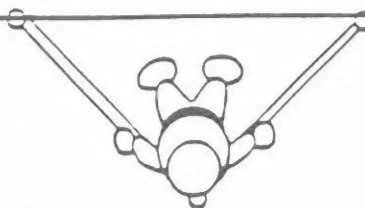


MATWATCH



**The
Annual
Beyond...
1988**

**MATWATCH
Man
of the
Year:**

**EDDIE
GILBERT**

MATWATCH: 1988
THE ANNUAL BEYOND. . . .

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MATWATCH '88: THE ANNUAL BEYOND

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
OF

BRUISER BRODY

1946 - 1988

The tragic alleged murder of Bruiser Brody in the summer of 1988 reminded all of us how mortal the men are who appear to be verbally and physically invincible in a genre of sports and entertainment which transcends the understanding of conventional sports consumers.

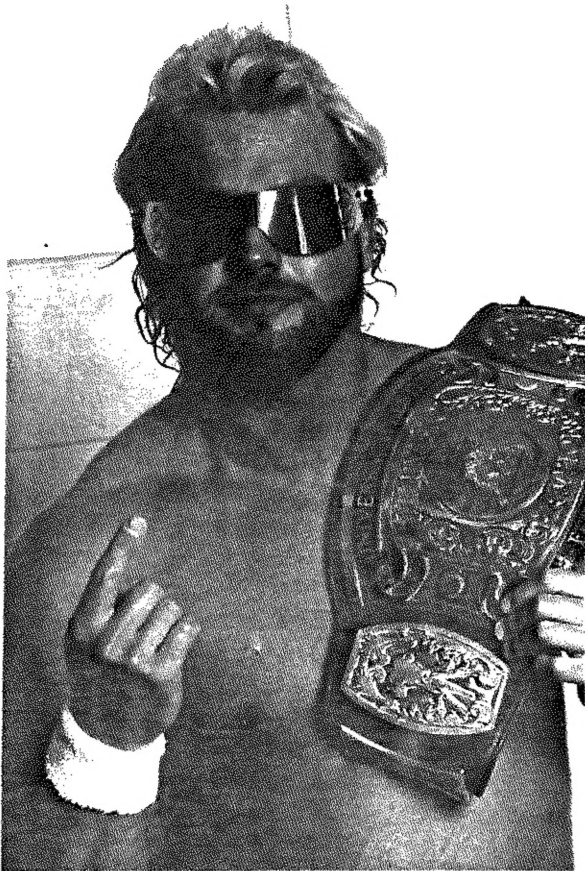
In Brody's case, the ability to reach out and grab a crowd by the neck and make them attentive parallels the way Ethel Merman could shake an audience with "I've Got Rhythm" or the timing of a Bob Hope monologue.

Brody's final United States TV match was in June 1988 for SOUTHERN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, ironically, against perennial brawling partner Abdullah the Butcher. That particular event has captured a runner-up position in one of MATWATCH's key TV AWARDS categories and stands as a fitting tribute to the man for whom the name Bruiser was an inadequate monicker.

This is our small way of saying "thanks for the memories" to a great performer of the squared circle.

MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR:

Eddie
Gilbert



Characterizing Thomas Edward Gilbert II is like trying to define taste. Some days he may be the most talented overall man in professional wrestling; other days, he's in the midst of squabbles within promotions which often fail to refine the future for Gilbert. He has a gorgeous wife who wants to be a star. His persona is in the mold of the fifth-grade kid who looks as though---if he hasn't already---he is about to plunge knee-deep into mischief.

Our choice for the first MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR has had anything but a stable year. Eddie Gilbert began 1988 a favorite for DECLINING STAR OF THE YEAR. Mired in the rubble of the Jim Crockett/Dusty Rhodes destruction job of the Universal Wrestling Federation, Gilbert struggled merely to obtain a five-minute TV match in the NWA, much less an interview. Offered a chance to join the Rick Steiner-Mike Rotunda combo in the Varsity Club (only Dusty knows what college Eddie would have attended), Eddie opted for a smaller promotion which provided star billing.

Eddie Gilbert's year regenerated in Memphis. With his father Tommy and brother Doug, along with Missy, the Gilberts ignited perhaps the hottest family feud in the USA in 1988. The Gilberts and Jerry Jarrett's family put such heat in Memphis rings that tobasco sauce would have a cold

taste. Eddie's style increasingly resembled Terry Funk but a TV angle in the first quarter earned a new chapter in the studio textbook of pro wrestling.

With a surprise visit from the reportedly injured Jerry Lawler, the two stallions began a brawl that went through the legendary hallway of the WMC-TV studios, into the station parking lot and onto several cars. By the time eight minutes had elapsed (and I assure you no one had tripped to the refrigerator), Lawler---who had controlled 60 per cent of the action, thanks to a stellar selling job by Eddie---was slammed and crashed into a shattering windshield. Had it not been for a bonecrushing slugfest between the Midnight Express and the Fantastics, which sent both Tommy Rogers and Bobby Fulton to the hospital, the Gilbert-Lawler free-for-all would have been a shoo-in TV BRAWL OF THE YEAR (maybe a runner-up behind the Skinheads-Roy Innis-audience brawl on GERALDO!).

The first week in April turned the fortunes of Eddie Gilbert in a fashion unexpected at year's birth. Broadcaster David Woods had purchased the failing Continental Championship group of Ron Fuller in February and was looking for a booker. Gilbert was hired to turn around a TV product which had muddled itself in repetition with a talent base of Robert Fuller's Stud Stable, Wendell Cooley, the Nightmares, Dutch Mantel and Bob Armstrong's family. Outside observers believed, at best, if Gilbert could raise the level of the newly christened Continental Wrestling Federation to mediocrity, a moral victory could be claimed.

In Gilbert's first four weeks, the shows resembled technical butcher jobs. Abrupt audio edits in commentary, particularly at the ends of shows, and disjointed dissolves during angles made the shows difficult to watch. Yet, in Gilbert's debut show, a foreshadowing of freshness featured a "hanging" angle involving four principals who played their roles as if they were in an off-Broadway drama.

The incident began with Mystic, the valet of Dirty White Boy Tony Anthony, appearing on the CWF set in tears with apparent bruises on her face, pleading with host Gordon Solie to bring Tom Prichard to the platform. Solie acted the part of compassionate father in a manner reflective of the old Solie-Piper NWA days. Finally, after several failures to retrieve Prichard, Solie left the set and returned with Tom. At the moment the drama's rising action hit its peak, when Mystic virtually had Prichard sold that she wanted to break from the chains of Anthony's abuse, the

White Boy sneak attacked Prichard and tied a hangman's noose around Tom. Prichard was dragged from the Birmingham stage, down the aisle, to a corner ringpost, where he was "hung" in a masterful 11-minute angle which finally ended when several babyfaces arrived.

It was only one angle but suddenly, people were talking about Continental wrestling. Gilbert cut the three heavyweight championship belts back to one and declared a new CWF belt up for grabs in a potential supercard, THE ROAD TO BIRMINGHAM, to coincide with the reopening of the Steel City's remodeled Boutwell Auditorium.

Eddie then went to work on personnel. As a close associate told MATWATCH, "Eddie said, 'I want some money guys.' His philosophy was: it doesn't matter how much heat there is between us, if you can draw money, you have a job." That may be an exaggeration but, clearly, surprises were ahead. The first major acquisition was manager Paul E. Dangerously, who had already stirred up dust in Florida, Memphis, Southern and the AWA. Gilbert believed Dangerously had major star potential and immediately installed him as lead heel manager (and assistant booker). Gilbert brought back Nightmare Ken Wayne from Memphis and after three weeks of Wayne's arrogance after wins with face partner Danny Davis, Ken turned on his fellow Nightmare and freshened the focus on both men. A major surprise was Willie B. Hert, a rechristened Pez Whatley---who was sinking in the same NWA sand (as Gilbert had earlier) as Shaska. Eddie recognized the heavy black audience in the Alabama-Mississippi markets and, despite admonishments from observers, Gilbert succeeded in putting Hert over. Going for a new character, Gilbert took rookie Bob Carter and turned him into The D.I., pairing him with young Mark Scarpa in a Gomer Pyle angle. Jobber Alan Martin was developed into a heel manager and handled former WWF'er Sika and Kokina as the new Samoans.

Within three months, the CWF, under Gilbert's guidance, had a weekly slot on the FNN/SCORE cable network and was drawing 2-to-1 more viewer mail than rival CWA cablecasts. Clearly, Gilbert was creating excitement as Montgomery, Alabama, began to sell out for shows, in marked contrast to the 250-ticket houses one year earlier.

If Gilbert exhibited a flaw, he tended to over-angle his shows, sometimes with as many as four run-ins and two to three non-ring angles per one-hour show, leaving little time for actual contests. Yet, Eddie spread the pushes around generously, giving viewers a reason to care about

his new characters and feuds.

MATWATCHer Dan Farren said, "It's like the old UWF has come back to life. It's the most fun show to watch because you're never sure what's going to happen." Indeed, the summer kicked off with Eddie testing the patience of vehement Southern crowds. A dramatic angle saw Dangerously and Eddie taunt the 14-year-old son of Whatley about his father. When Pez Jr. socked Paul E., Gilbert suckerpunched the teenager and proceeded to stomp him mercilessly until a shower soap-soaked Pez (Willie B.) and several faces dashed out for the save. Color commentator Joe Pedicino served as impromptu bouncer to hold back two fans who tried to jump the railing and get to Gilbert. The Alabama faithful were hopping.

Gilbert's own feud with Austin Idol played a parallel role to Idol's quest for Jerry Lawler's AWA title. During a TV taping in Dothan, Ala., for the AWA belt, Gilbert ran in to burn Idol as he was about to clutch Lawler in a figure-4 leglock.

But Gilbert's own plan for a supercard, which outsiders insisted was coming too early for the CWF, was a subtle, yet significant contributor to his early downfall. Planned for a July date, the ROAD TO BIRMINGHAM suffered at least six postponements, thanks to union problems delaying the Boutwell renovation. Concurrently, Woods purchased the USA promotion Ron Fuller had begun in Tennessee upon selling out to Woods in February. The USA buyout strained purse strings a bit but Gilbert continued to bring in outside talent, such as Ronnie Garvin (for a Tennessee show) and reached agreement with Bob Orton Jr., Chris Adams, Tommy Rich and Terry Gordy to flank the CWF regulars in TRTB title tournament. With an expanded TV network, local telecasts reaching into Louisiana and plans to stretch the telecasts into Oklahoma and further into Florida, Gilbert undeniably had designs on ultimately making a run at the two major U. S. promotions.

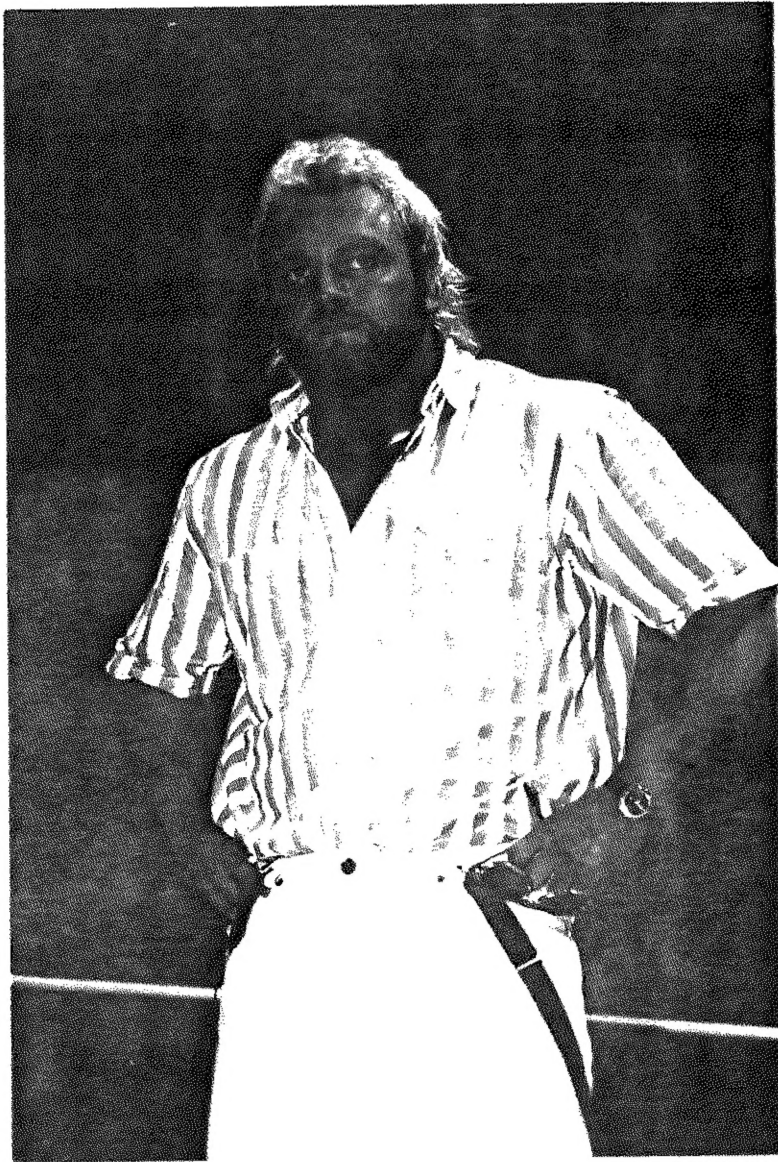
But the acquisition of Ron West as general manager of the CWF in mid-summer soured Gilbert. The West and Gilbert philosophies on promotion operation did not mesh. Amidst charges and countercharges, tension mounted. In the days prior to TRTB, Gilbert claimed a serious shoulder injury which required hospitalization. Inside the promotion, charges developed that payoffs were slanted toward Gilbert's favorites while countercharges were leveled that owner Woods was responsible for payout problems.

Unfortunately, for the CWF and its growing legion of fans, other issues---Missy Hyatt's role, the youth of Dangerously as an assistant booker, the differences with West, and disputes over talent acquisitions led to a final straw. Eleven days before TRTB, Gilbert was either fired or resigned as booker after a charge that Eddie was not truthful to the CWF about working a show in Kansas City when he was allegedly still suffering with the shsoulder. Sources close to Gilbert insist the promotion knew of Gilbert's KC booking. Hyatt, Doug Gilbert and Dangerously all immediately left and the major outside names (except Gordy) withdrew from TRTB.

Since Gilbert's departure, the CWF has lost its national cable slot and the talent roster has reverted predominantly to the cast which staffed its shows in its Fuller days.

The final quarter of 1988 has been a semi-quiet one for Gilbert. Going full circle, he returned to the NWA, inexplicably as a babyface (allegedly to aid Jimmy Garvin in his battle with Kevin Sullivan), and only in December has he received a semi-push as a tag team partner with Ron Simmons before gaining a shot at U.S. champion Barry Windham on TBS Christmas Eve. Yet, one has the idea at any moment, Gilbert is capable of turning the NWA into his own sideshow.

In a year where singling out the one breakthrough individual for his accomplishments finds a largely dry well, MATWATCH chooses Eddie Gilbert as its first MAN OF THE YEAR for creating six months of excitement in one of the nation's least anticipated promotions, for proving his almost unparalleled ability to create quality wrestling television, for making a quarter of Memphis wrestling intense to watch, and for bringing a sense of the unexpected to the bulk of the areas he has populated in 1988. One can only hope that in 1989, a redeveloped NWA can allow Eddie the creative room he needs to bring the same sense of unpredictability to an all too predictable national promotion.



1988 MATWATCH
MAN OF THE YEAR

Eddie Gilbert

MATWATCHER
OF THE
YEAR:

Dan
Gibson



IF MATWATCH '88: THE ANNUAL BEYOND accomplishes little more, it allows me to repay in a small dosage the kindness afforded me by a man as I grew into adulthood.

Pro wrestling polarizes the emotions of the American public as do few forms of entertainment. But I suppose wrestling put such a chokehold on me because it gave me the opportunity for fellowship with people who cared not who you were, whether you lived in a home like Ward Cleaver's, or if your family ate meals on silver pallettes. One man was my conduit to pro wrestling but he is much more than that.

One Thursday night, Dan Gibson invited me to attend a wrestling card in the Jacksonville Coliseum with him and his boys, Johnny and Charlie. To this day, I'll not forget the downtown meal of trout almonidine at Morrison's; the two boys who were about as much alike as a foot ruler and a vaulter's pole in height, yet their father insisted to the ticket clerk, "They twins. They sho' don't look it....but they twins!" Anything for a 50-cent admission.

I well remember the centerpiece of that night: a boxer-versus-wrestler match between Lou Thesz and Jersey Joe Walcott, which Thesz took in the sixth round with a Boston crab but encountered a bloody nose for his trouble. And I remember the crowd popping for Jose Lothario winning the first of a best-of-3 fall match against Gene Kiniski.

But I remember a lot more than seeing J.C. Dykes and his evil Infernos for the first time. I remember the talks we had that evening and many more Thursdays afterward about life, the travails of growing up in an increasingly skeptical society of

youth, the fact that girls were looking much more appealing every year, and the skittishness we all had about possibly serving in a war we weren't certain our country truly wanted to win. Mr. G, as we call him, talked to us about all of these critical issues. But more importantly, he listened.

My father traveled extensively in the 1960s and Mr. G never forgot me when his Thursday night junkets to Jacksonville rolled around. Because of Dan Gibson, I first saw Dory Funk Jr., Jack Brisco, Kiniski, Nick Bockwinkel, The Great Malenko, Haystacks Calhoun, Eddie Graham, Sam Steamboat, and the myriad of heroes of my childhood. And I always appreciated the fact that Mr. G truly enjoyed wrestling, too. He wasn't a closet fan. And when he put his mind to it, he could let out a boo that could be heard to the St. Matthews Bridge in Jacksonville.

When I was old enough to drive, I tried to do the same thing for younger relatives in my family: hauling them to that coliseum on Thursdays with a hope that maybe for a few hours, we could grow closer together as people as well as enjoy an evening of entertainment.

In the last year, I've grown to appreciate the fondness people like Ron Lemieux, John Lanigan, Harry White, Mike Gunter, Dan Reilly, and so many, many wonderful people in the wrestling audience feel for this most special genre. But in my world, Mr. G is the King of all of you. He introduced me to pro wrestling, a commodity which has been mine through a successful career in broadcasting and now in academics. But more than that, he introduced me to the fact that living an honest, integrity-centered life is the most important thing one can exhibit.

For those key values, it is one of the greatest joys of my lifetime to name Dan Gibson of Waycross, Georgia, the 1988 MATWATCHER OF THE YEAR and in succeeding years, to name the honor the DAN GIBSON MATWATCHER OF THE YEAR AWARD.

Not many of you will have a chance to meet the still-enthusiastic Mr. G, unless---by chance---we have a convention in the Deep South in a future year. But I assure you, you would like him and find the qualities in a man deserving of all of our respect.

Thanks, Mr. G. You'll always be King MATWATCHER in my arena.

MATWATCH: TOP 10 STORIES IN TV WRESTLING '88

In our effort to concentrate on how television and wrestling have meshed in 1988, our Top 10 focus is on the stories which have truly made a dent in the year's progress in broadcasting and cable wrestling. In some instances, our selections deal with continuing stories which cannot be narrowed down to a single event. As in any yearend recap, the ranking on the selections themselves are arguable. But all went together to write the tube history of a rather strange year in the ring:

1. PRO WRESTLING RETURNS TO PRIME TIME TELEVISION ON NBC

In most of our adolescent imaginations, this day would never have transpired, thus being the MATWATCH selection for the top TV story of the year. For the nation's number one broadcast network to opt for a prime time broadcast of a pro wrestling card after the genre admittedly was past a peak in its mid-to-late '80s popularity even brought a spot in Johnny Carson's monologue. The failure of Randy Savage to win the WWF Intercontinental title from the Honky Tonk Man in the opener was but a mere shadow of the cartoonish scene at the end of Hulk Hogan's WWF title loss to Andre the Giant.

For one thing, the screw job ending was worse than any pass interference call in football, with Hogan's shoulder obviously up on a count of one at the 17-minute mark. But no one in the building could have surmised the episode of apparent twin referee Dave Hebners arguing with each other over the uproarious outcome. The exchange was reminiscent of Lucille Ball's & Harpo Marx's famous mirror sequence on I LOVE LUCY. Andre quickly passed the belt onto Ted DiBiase, whose title reign was aborted one week later by declaration of a WWF tournament to determine Hogan's successor with WWF figurehead president Jack Tunney declaring Andre's "gift" illegal.

The event turned out to be the highest-rated Friday night program of the season for NBC, yet it fell far short of "top 10" expectations from network executives. The Hogan-Andre battle finished 31st in the Nielsens with a 15.2 rating and 25 percent share of audience, falling in about the middle of the ratings pack. Yet, 33 million people watched the hour---the largest audience for a single pro wrestling event in history and that alone qualifies THE MAIN EVENT, in MATWATCH's view, as the top TV story of the year.

2. THE BATTLE OF MARCH 27: WRESTLEMANIA VS. CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS

While Vince McMahon had successfully blunted Jim Crockett's entry into the pay-per-view business with his January 24 ROYAL RUMBLE (see later story), no head-to-head matchup in the history of pro wrestling on television offered more significance to two competing promotions than this confrontation. The impact was felt in more ways than Vince McMahon's pocketbook, primarily because no one gave Crockett a prayer to succeed after a disappointing STARRCADE '87 and an off-putting BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE.

McMahon's WRESTLEMANIA had all the trappings of the event which might, indeed, destroy Crockett's NWA: a lavish setting inside Atlantic City's Trump Plaza, a tournament---headlined by a Hogan-Andre rematch---to determine a new WWF champion, the two supporting WWF titles on the line, and a track record spelled \$\$\$\$ from the smash success of WRESTLEMANIA III. And for all of the reasons many observers saw an encore for McMahon, creative failure came.

His casino audience of 17,000 rarely came to life, leaving a television audience flat. The four hours of satellite time appeared to drag unmercifully within the tournament format (which had too few wrestlers with strong workrates to make it succeed), plus the telegraphed ending (via a self-alleged faux pas in WWF magazine revealing Randy Savage as "new WWF champion" prior to the show) killed much of the show's suspense.

On the other hand, Crockett---armed with a new TBS cable contract calling for four live specials a year---had nothing to lose. A young impresario named Sting, whose push was accelerated when several alternate competitors departed the NWA, had caught fire and wrestled Ric Flair to a classic 45-minute draw. A Midnight Express vs. Fantastics U.S. Tag Team Championship match evolved into one of the most brutal brawls in recent NWA history. Plus, Lex Luger & Barry Windham---in, ironically, their next-to-final national TV appearance as a tag team---won the NWA world belts from Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson.

While McMahon still probably grossed \$15-\$16 million from WRESTLEMANIA IV, the overall take was about \$9 million under what Titan Sports was predicting before the show. The verdict for Crockett: a 5.8 rating and 13 share of the national cable audience. The Sting-Flair finale tallied a 7.1 rating and record (for pro wrestling) 15 share---and its 3.5 million homes set a new single-event cable standard.

The "doubleheader" conflict forced many viewers to choose the free show and some cable estimates are that CLASH's audience

may have increased by 60% if VCR users had been tallied. The major fallout of the CLASH-WM4 shootout was a demand by cable operators for Ted Turner and Vince McMahon to stop scheduling head-to-head shows because of the financial toll taken on both the wrestling promotions and the cable industry, which stands to profit handsomely from successful PPV shows.



RIC FLAIR: MATCH VS. STING SETS CABLE TV VIEWING RECORD
Mar. 27 Showdown Seen In 3.5 Million Homes
(Photo by Steve Bryant)

3. TED TURNER BUYS THE NWA

In one of the most entangled on-again, off-again negotiations ever, Turner Broadcasting System finally purchased controlling interest (according to informed sources, 65%) of the National Wrestling Alliance (Jim Crockett Promotions) Nov. 1. The HOLLYWOOD REPORTER estimated the sale price at "just under eight figures," in a complex deal which places distribution of all NWA TV programs under Turner Program Services, gives Turner all revenue from pay-per-view shows and homevideo sales and moves the NWA headquarters to Atlanta.

TBS director of syndication Jack Petrik was named president of the new subsidiary, Universal Wrestling Corporation (which will retain the NWA name). Former TV executive Jim Herd took over day-to-day operations Jan. 3 as executive vice president and Crockett retains a v.p. title.

Early indications are that Herd will spend January drafting talent and February adjusting the TV product. But the certainty here is that without the Turner purchase, the NWA's celebrated 80-plus years of history would have ended.

4. CONTINUED RISE OF PAY-PER-VIEW INFLUENCE IN WRESTLING TV ECONOMICS

A record seven pay-cable wrestling "supercards" were offered in 1988, three each by the WWF and NWA and one by Verne Gagne, in association with FNN/SCORE and Jerry Jarrett.

Judging from reliable cable industry estimates, the pay-per-view wrestling business grossed approximately \$40 million, led by the \$16 million take from WRESTLEMANIA IV (though Titan Sports has announced inflated figures bordering \$40 million). The major creative successes came from Titan's Thanksgiving night SURVIVOR SERIES, which featured 50 wrestlers and the first saga in the ultimate split between Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage; and the NWA's STARRCADE, which appeared to be a marginal card on paper and offered a surprisingly strong Lex Luger-Ric Flair match toplining the bill.

Turner Home Entertainment took over pay-cable operations for Jim Crockett Promotions in the spring and led off with the marginally profitable GREAT AMERICAN BASH, which drew an approximate 2.2% buy-in of an available nine million homes.

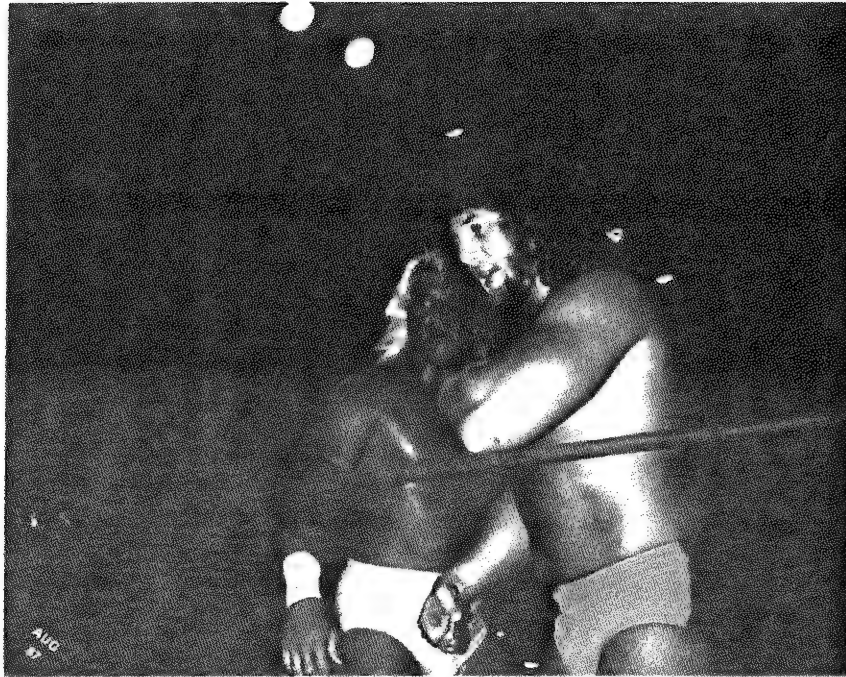
The AWA/Jarrett card in Chicago Dec. 12 drew an approximate 0.8% buy-in but suffered severe problems at the promotional level. The card was also the second in a spiral of five PPV shows in 12 weeks spreading into 1989.

The partial ownership of TBS by a consortium of cable operators has successfully staved off an effort by Titan to freeze all other wrestling promoters out of the pay-per-view game. But question marks remain in '89 as to how special so-called "supercards" can be made when as many as ten may hit home screens during the year.

5. DAVID WOODS PURCHASES CWF AND USA PROMOTIONS FROM RON FULLER

Alabama television executive David Woods purchased Continental Championship Wrestling in February from Ron Fuller for an undisclosed price and, in a strange financial move, bought Fuller's Tennessee-based USA promotion six months later.

Woods, who owns independent station WCOV in Montgomery, Ala.,



TOM PRICHARD BECOMES CWF CHAMPION DURING
DAVID WOODS OWNERSHIP OF PROMOTION
"The Doctor's" Feud With Tony Anthony Highlights Early Spring
in CWF
(John Lanigan Collection)

and whose family has been in the television business since the 1950s, bought into a dormant promotion and within three months, demonstrated an acumen for turning the operation around by hiring Eddie Gilbert as booker (see MAN OF THE YEAR and STORY #6).

Of significance here is that Woods became the first full-time broadcaster to own a wrestling promotion, a trend which Ted Turner continued in the fall. Rechristened the Continental Wrestling Federation, the show eventually expanded its network to 15 markets in the Southeast and won a spot for several months on a national cable sports network.

6. RISING SUCCESS OF CWF TV DURING HOT APRIL-OCTOBER RALLY

The Woods purchase and subsequent Gilbert hiring gave way to a dramatic turnaround in this promotion's television fortunes. The first major angle under Gilbert, a 12-minute hanging of Tom Prichard by Tony Anthony, set up by a beautifully-acted "sucker" performance by Anthony's valet Mystic and a straight man tour de force by Gordon Solie, set the stage for Gilbert's angle-dominated shows.

The promotion began taping predominantly in the Alabama capital of Montgomery before sellout crowds, ten times the

size of which Fuller's Continental group had drawn the previous year.

Gilbert's talent acquisitions are documented in MATWATCH: THE ANNUAL BEYOND'S cover story but the rise of a young Shane Douglas, the split of former Nightmares Danny Davis and Ken Wayne, the resurgence of Austin Idol and a summer of heated angles against new AWA champion Jerry Lawler all highlighted the TV series, which topped WHEEL OF FORTUNE in the ratings in the CWF's home base of Montgomery.

Gilbert's ouster after a September of disputes with Woods can be traced as the source of sharp decline in a group which had become the talk of the nation through its placement on the FNN/SCORE network. A restoration of the old Fuller-era talent served to reduce crowds and the quality of the television series in short order.

7. DECLINE OF RATINGS, CLEARANCES OF TV WRESTLING ON INDEPENDENT STATIONS

In August 1988, MATWATCH declared that the peak of the television wrestling era had finally been reached and a meltdown in coverage by local stations across the USA would be registered.

The first major drop in carriage came when WATL, in the nation's 12th market of Atlanta---which had pioneered Joe Pedicino's SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING marathon block on Saturday nights in 1985, canceled SUPERSTARS (which resurfaced without a break on the weaker WVEU) and only retained a midnight edition of WWF SUPERSTARS. General manager John Serrao told Pedicino that the Outlet Communications station "no longer wanted to be known as 'the wrestling station.'"

KDNL in St. Louis, which has been a dominant force in pro wrestling carriage since the Sam Muchnick years, cut back from seven hours of ring shows to two. WAWS in Jacksonville, Fla., dropped its nightly strip. In Los Angeles, where KTTV carried a variety of promotions in 1986, two WWF shows are left on major independents and the NWA (which had to take a 2 a.m. Friday slot on WPIX in New York) was reduced to a 3:30 a.m. spot on KNBC.

As a whole, national ratings for the four WWF syndicated shows dropped about 1.4 points over the previous year. The NWA suffered a two-point drop, in large part from loss of markets from 198 at the start of 1988 to 141 at year's end.

Pedicino, whose PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK series dropped to 24

markets in late 1988, told MATWATCH, "You can't imagine how difficult it is to get a show cleared today. Too many stations feel like we've finally passed the oversaturation stage and I don't believe anybody could start up a truly national promotion today and get enough stations necessary to carry the show. Station managers are simply saying, 'We don't want any more wrestling.'"

The trend may not be a small reason why Fuller's USA, Billy Jack Haynes' OWF, and Jody Hamilton's Deep South promotions all ceased operation during the year---the first two beginning and ending in less than six months.



GORDON SOLIE: 1984 WITH DICK SLATER, TOMMY RICH
The Dean of Commentators Ousted From 4 Shows in 1988
(From GORDON SOLIE: Master of the Ring)

8. GORDON SOLIE: A SAD ODYSSEY FOR TELEVISION'S DEAN OF WRESTLING COMMENTATORS

After losing his 36-year association with NWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING FROM FLORIDA in 1987, Gordon Solie, at age 60, became the bouncing ball of professional wrestling in 1988.

Beginning the year with confirmed slots on the Continental show and PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK, Solie was dropped from PWTW in the spring when the show was cut to a half-hour and its budget slashed. Shortly thereafter, in a departure reminiscent of his

exit from the TBS NWA show after 12 years in 1985, Solie quietly disappeared from the CWF broadcast, only weeks after one of his best contributions since the Roddy Piper years in the Tom Prichard-Mystic-Tony Anthony hanging angle.

Solie had already hooked on with the fledgling Ron Fuller USA promotion and hosted all 26 weeks. But Solie lost the slot when Fuller folded the organization in early summer, two weeks after another comical Solie bit when he attempted to physically separate Fuller and Ron Wright's "bodyguard."

Still focusing on Florida fans, Solie had assumed the role as host of the declining Global show but left it to join Mike Graham's and Steve Keirn's revamped Florida promotion, which led to one of the classless bits in TV wrestling history. Global announcers Red Roberts and Bob Roop trashed Gordon as an alcoholic and incompetent and openly pointed to all of the TV jobs he had lost in recent years.

Solie ended the year holding the fort strictly with the Florida show, which resembled the pacing and production values of the 1960s CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING series, and began commuting to Canada for a co-host role with Ed Whalen on PRO WRESTLING PLUS, the North-of-the-border version of PWTW.

TBS held some talks with Solie about returning for part of the new NWA package but, at press time, those discussions had apparently stalled.

9. PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK TRIBUTE TO BRUISER BRODY

In a rare half-hour which saw grown men in a battler's arena show emotion, PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK was one of only three American TV shows (World Class and Southern the others) to acknowledge the tragic death of Bruiser Brody.

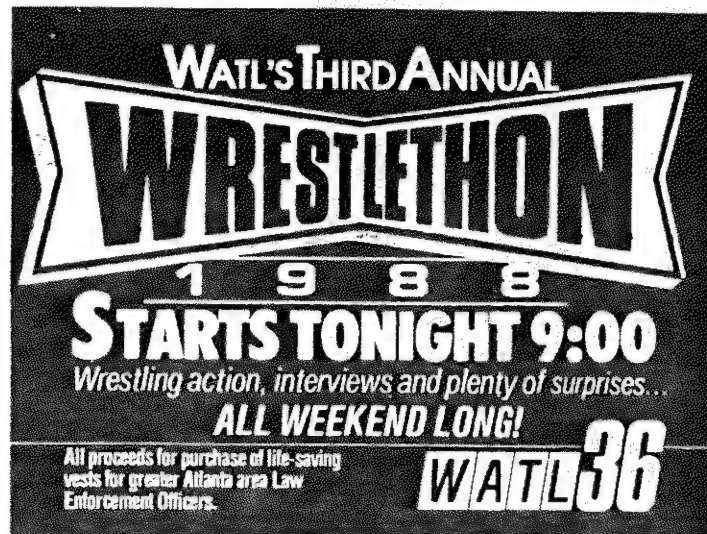
Joe Pedicino and Rick Stewart taped the memorial in an empty Atlanta area arena as Buck Robley, Jerry Blackwell, Tommy Rich, Mr. Wrestling II and other SCW stars remembered the man who came to epitomize larger-than-life in pro wrestling.

The show was only seen in approximately 40 markets but is a video collector's treasure. Pedicino and show producer Ken LaMorta did perhaps their finest editing job ever as they simply allowed the honest feelings of Brody's peers pour through. Clips were shown of some of Brody's key U.S. matches.

But the shining moments came when tears came to the eyes of Blackwell as he reminisced about losing "more than a ringmate."

Robley asked Brody to "save me a place because I'll be seeing you again before long. "

This was the one show of 1988 in which wrestling was not the animal which held one's attention but the sincerity and kindred spirit of a man's peers who truly felt a loss with his loss.



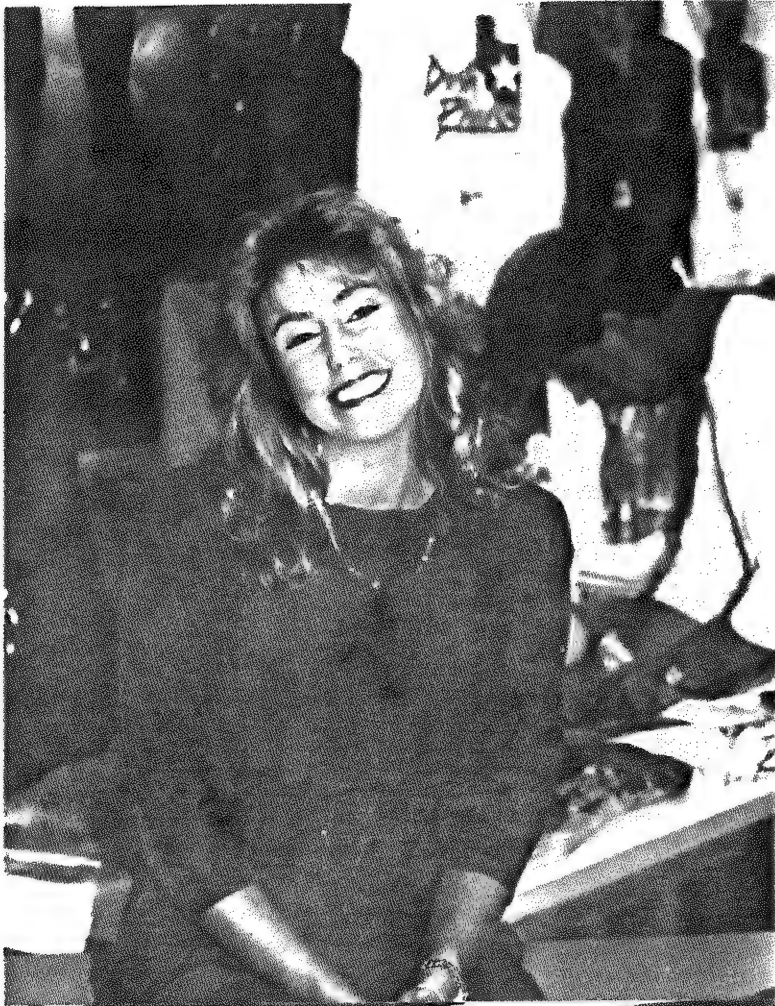
10. WATL WRESTLETHON CONTINUES SUCCESS IN RAISING MONEY FOR POLICE BULLET-PROOF VESTS

Pedicino's annual 18-hour marathon accomplished two firsts in 1988: one, it was the first non-WWF promotion to receive national attention on the Fox Network's LATE SHOW, and, two, the program marked the return of a live wrestling show to Atlanta television for the first time in 20 years.

The Wrestlethon was kicked off with an angle on Ross Shafer's LATE SHOW which saw Eddie Gilbert & Paul E. Dangerously attack rookie Joey Maggs and lead to a chaotic four-minute segment in which Shafer demonstrated virtually no knowledge of pro wrestling and all of the WATL participants battled for air time.

Pedicino offered a morning block of wrestling and a studio party for children, all the while raising money for bullet-proof vests for the Atlanta Police Department.

Late afternoon saw an updated version of Pedicino's 2 1/2-hour documentary, THE HISTORY OF PRO WRESTLING IN ATLANTA, which featured---ironically---Jim Crockett, not currently one of Joe's running buddies, Gordon Solie, and former veteran Atlanta announcer Ed Capral.

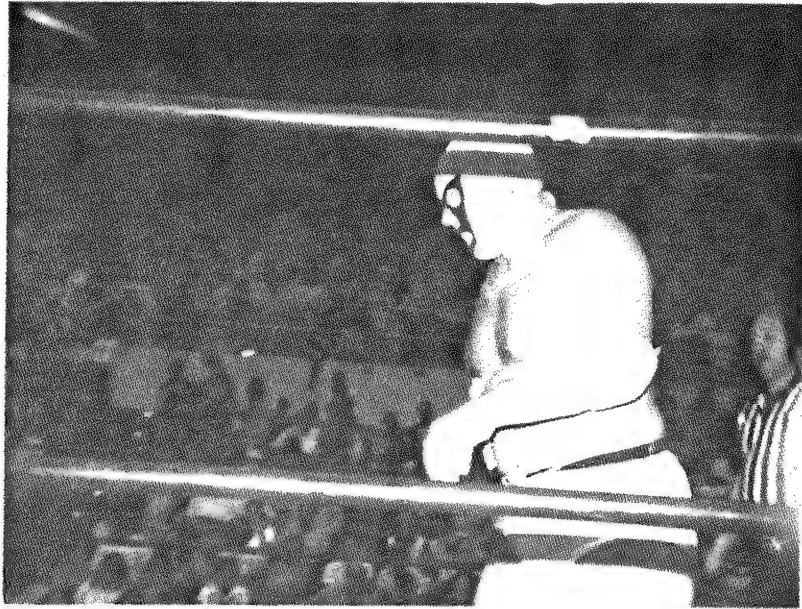


MISSY AND EDDIE
FEATURED PROMINENTLY
IN ATLANTA
WATL WRESTLETHON
(Photos by Steve Bryant)



The 2 1/2-hour live show, featuring predominantly SCW and AWA stars, ended with an Eddie Gilbert-Tommy Rich showdown that led to a bizarre finish as Dick Slater entered the ring and attacked both contestants.

But the focal point of the annual event, which moves to Atlanta's WVEU-TV in 1989, is the funds raised for charitable causes and WRESTLETHON remains the only extravaganza of its kind on U.S. television.



MR. WRESTLING II APPEARS ON WATL WRESTLETHON
II Featured In Atlanta Documentary

YOU UNWERTHAN, DAVID CROCK-ETT,
THAT THE DREE-UM-- HONK!--
IS A LES-JEUD-- WHEEZE!--
AND NOW IT'S TY-UM-- BLEET!--
TO GET FUM-KAY LIKE A

MOU-KAY--
GASP!

CAT CALL! BOOO! WE HATE YOU!
HISS! DO A JOB!

BOOOOO! HISSSS!

GO ON A DIET, FAT BOY!

GRRRR!
OUTA THE DREAM'S WAY!

SORRY, SIR...

TIME FOR A
REE-ALITY
CHECK

GOOD--ND
ONE AROUND...

AH--THERE'S
THE DREAM'S
MIRROR!

AH KNEW IT--STILL
A STUD!

TALES
OF THE
DUSTY
UNIVERSE

BY POTSHOT

©1988 BY BILL KUNDEL

WHAT THE DREAMER
SEES WHEN HE
LOOKS IN THE MIRROR,
HAWK...

THERE'S NOT A STEROID... HONK!... IN THIS
BOD-DAY... WHEEZE... JESS SOME WHIS-KAY... SOME
...CASANYA... HONK... A MEATBALL HERO... GASP...
...A RILLY TASTY PAR... SOME APPLE PIE A LA MODE,
...A LITTLE WING... COFF...
IF YOU WILL etc. etc. etc.

* * * M A T W A T C H T V A W A R D S * * *

By the year 2000, or, frankly, by next month, few people will forget these monumental outcomes. But it's been great fun discovering how you view the year 1988 in pro wrestling from a TV standpoint. We tried to grade a few categories you don't find in the other fine awards voting, so I hope it was fun for you.

An important note: Sgt. Perry Cross of Fort Bragg, N.C., won our "match-the-outcomes" contest, correctly predicting the order or finish in 45 categories. My congratulations to a man who says he used to watch my nightly editorials on WWAY-TV in Wilmington, N.C. He receives a free month of MATWATCH.

Now, the winners:

BROADCAST TV MATCH OF THE YEAR

WINNER: MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. FANTASTICS, U.S. Tag Team Championship, World Wide Wrestling, April, 432 points.

2ND: FLAIR VS. STING, NWA PRO/World Wide, Feb., 292.

3RD: HULK HOGAN VS. ANDRE THE GIANT, The Main Event, NBC, Feb., 180.

The 43-minute match which saw the Fantastics capture the U.S. belts was one of the rare all-show events which can hold a contemporary audience's attention, thanks to the workrate of the four principals and Jim Cornette. It was a classic situation of an "against-the-odds" comeback win for the Rogers/Fulton combo which appeared out at least a half-dozen times.

The Flair-Sting match was the event in which Sting applied a scorpion on the champion and Flair had to be carried out in an unusual occurrence. If I was surprised, it was that the Hogan-Andre match did not have broader support, simply because of the impact of Hogan's loss.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Road Warriors/Sting vs. Varsity Club (68), Austin Idol vs. Jerry Lawler, CWF (32), Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage (SNME) (32), Bruiser Brody/Tommy Rich/Eddie Gilbert vs. Abdullah the Butcher/Buck Robley/Dick Slater (9), Terry Taylor vs. Chris Adams (3), Brody vs. Nord the Barbarian (3), Owen Hart vs. Makhan Singh (1), Wendell Cooley vs. Buddy Landell (1).

CABLE/PPV MATCH OF THE YEAR

WINNER: FLAIR VS. STING, Clash of the Champions I, TBS, 368.

2ND: MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. FANTASTICS, Clash I, 320.

3RD: RANDY SAVAGE VS. TED DiBIASE, MSG Network, 116.

The 45-minute Flair-Sting draw, repeated Jan. 7 on TBS was the match which made Sting a national star on the same day Savage was winning the WWF belt. Two keys to its success: the maturing of Sting and the remarkable ability of Flair to carry a greener newcomer who can work well with the champion. The drama of the afternoon's showdown with WRESTLEMANIA heightened its quality.

As the votes came in, the Midnight-Fantastics out-and-out street brawl which saw both Tommy Rogers & Bobby Fulton hospitalized afterward often had the lead. The brutality of seeing Rogers bulldogged on a table is still vivid. The Savage-DiBiase affair may have had more support had it been seen by more.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Barry Windham vs. Tully Blanchard, Jan. TBS (72), Jerry Lawler vs. Curt Hennig, ESPN (56); Savage vs. DiBiase, WM4 (44); Flair vs. Lex Luger, Bash (20); Lex Luger/Windham vs. Blanchard/Arn Anderson, Clash I (16); Calgary 8-man tag match featuring Owen Hart & Makhan Singh (28); Guererro Bros. vs. Badd Co. (9); DiBiase vs. Don Muraco (7); SURVIVOR SERIES Tag Team Battle (7); Midnight-Fantastics, Bash (3); Nasty Boys vs. Rock & Roll Express (3); Flair-Tully-Arn vs. Barry-Sting-Luger, NWA Main Event (1); Benoit vs. Smith, Stampede (1); Flair vs. Hawk, Bunkhouse Stampede (1).

BEST NEW CHARACTERS

WINNER: Varsity Club, NWA, 392.

2ND: Brother Love, WWF, 200.

3RD: Samoan Swat Team, World Class, 128.

I was a bit surprised at this because the WWF is the organization which specializes in comedy, but as reader Carl Freeman writes, "These guys absolutely slay me the way they put each other on. Even Sullivan is funny." Ironically, Eddie Gilbert nearly became part of the "club."

Bruce Prichard as Brother Love has struck fans as a love or love-to-hate guy and was a real breakthrough character for Titan. I had Bossman pegged as #3 because of the adaptability Ray Traylor has made to a new situation but most of those voting for the SST cited them, as Bob Clark of Unadilla, Ga., calls them, "the most brutal tag team since The Road Warriors."

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Big Bossman (104), Blue Blazer (68), Sid Vicious (44), The D.I. (40), Mr. Perfect (20), Red Rooster (16), Alan Martin (9), Scotty the Body and Willie B. Hert (3 each), The Beast and Akeem (1 each).

BEST COMEDIAN

WINNER: JIM CORNETTE, NWA, 460.
 2ND: RICK STEINER, NWA, 200.
 3RD: PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY, NWA, 168.

Because of Steiner's strong last quarter as his babyface turn approached and Dangerously's move to the more-exposed NWA, the TBS group swept this one. But Cornette proved the consummate performer when he made an unexpected turn to fan favorite, maintained his following and kept the loud-mouth histrionics so lovable. His end-of-the-year CLASH IV promo touting, "Season's beatings to all...and to all a good fight!", was outright hilarious.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Jesse Ventura (84), Bobby Heenan & Gorilla Monsoon (52), Brother Love (44), Makham Singh (40), Dutch Mantel (20), Jacques Rougeau (5), Gene Okerlund and Scotty the Body (3 each), Big Bossman and Eddie Gilbert (1 each).

BEST TV SUPERCARD

WINNER: CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS I, TBS, 484.
 2ND: THE MAIN EVENT, NBC, 168.
 3RD: WRESTLEMANIA IV, PPV, 104.

No contest here. The top-to-bottom quality of CLASH IV made a lasting imprint in a majority of readers' minds. At least 10 readers cast a vote for CLASH and no runners-up. The Hogan-Andre match certainly cemented a spot, particularly for WWF fans with THE MAIN EVENT. When you read the WORST OF...results you'll see how polarized people were over WM4. A final note: I'm betting SURVIVOR SERIES would have placed if not right in the midst of the balloting.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Royal Rumble, PPV (96); Baltimore Bash, PPV (80); Summer Slam, PPV, and Clash III, TBS (32 each); Clash II, TBS (24); Survivor Series, PPV (3), Bunkhouse Stampede, PPV (1).

BEST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

WINNER: JIM ROSS, NWA, 516.

2ND: LANCE RUSSELL, Memphis, 240.

3RD: GORDON SOLIE, CWF/PWTW/Global/USA/FCW, 104.

MATWATCH's editor has recently been accused of going overboard in praise of Jim Ross and I'll admit there's a reason. Whether you are a fan of Jim's or not, the man is probably the best-prepared announcer in the U.S. And readers apparently feel the same way, as a majority. Ross was our highest vote-getter in any category. He is well on his way to becoming TBS' top play-by-play man in 1989. As for Lance, my only disappointment is that he wasn't used on the ESPN tapings from Tennessee & Kentucky. A true veteran who hasn't lost a step. Apparently, Gordon Solie will not join the TBS team but MATWATCHers still feel strongly enough about his work to rate him among the best, even though his year was an unstable one.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Tony Schiavone (80), Bob Caudle (61), Joe Pedicino (23), Lee Marshall (9), Gorilla Monsoon and Vince McMahon (3 each), Larry Nelson and Bill Mercer (1 each).

BEST COLOR COMMENTATOR

WINNER: JESSE VENTURA, WWF, 484

2ND: JIM ROSS, NWA, 300.

3RD: MAKHAN SINGH, Stampede, 72.

Jesse is the standard by which this category is set, not just for his comedy but the fact that the man truly knows pro wrestling. Too bad he can't contribute the true histories of the competitors. As for Ross, his performance during CLASH I solidified him as one of the best, particularly in the way he sold Flair vs. Sting as a classic. I'd bet Singh would have piled many more votes were his show more widely viewed. The answer to Ed Whalen's question, "What is the worst move in pro wrestling?...Whoever made you play-by-play announcer" was priceless.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Roddy Piper, Portland (48); Joe Pedicino (45); Dutch Mantel (33), Dave Brown (32), Bobby Jagers (29), Bobby Heenan (28), Al Hayes (3), Lee Marshall (2), Ron Fuller and Bob Caudle (1 each).

BEST ANGLE

WINNER: ORIGINAL MIDNIGHT EXPRESS ATTACK ON MIDNIGHT EXPRESS, NWA/TBS, 252.

2ND: BARRY WINDHAM TURNS ON LEX LUGER, NWA/TBS, 140.

3RD: (TIE) EDDIE GILBERT ATTACKS PEZ WHATLEY JR., CWF, and ROAD WARRIORS TURN ON STING, NWA/TBS, 121 each.

What is amazing about this winner is that the angle came after the voting began and had to be written in without the suggested list. The impact of any angle at all on the TBS show at the time would have been solid but the sight of Jim Cornette juicing at the hands of the fastest-rising young manager in the sport struck nerves across the country. The significance of Barry's turn is that it was so hastily organized as an answer to fan apathy toward the Midnight Rider. Charlie Platt told me he thought he was going to have to get out his .22 when the Birmingham fans emptied out toward Gilbert when he slugged young Whatley. And who was associated with that angle, too? Dangerously. So many fans were anxious to see the Road Warriors go heel, their angle had to have a solid impact. My biggest surprise: I surely figured more votes for the Cheryl Roberts/Rick Rude storyline but it apparently didn't have lasting significance to readers.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Tony Anthony hangs Tom Prichard, CWF (104), Gilbert-Jerry Lawler parking lot brawl, CWA (76); Michael Hayes-Buddy Roberts concert brawl, WCCW (72); Dusty Rhodes baseball bat on Tully Blanchard (48); Twin Hebners, WWF (48); Cheryl Roberts-Rick Rude (44); Jake Roberts rips off Rude's tights (32); Roddy Piper-Mike Golden brawl, Portland (21); Hercules slave angle, WWF (20); Steiner turn (3); Sting crashes Flair Night (1); Stud Stable split, CWA (1); Jim Duggan 2x4s Andre the Giant (1).

MEMORABLE MOMENT OF THE YEAR

WINNER: TWIN HEBNERS, NBC, The Main Event, 304.

2ND: HULK HOGAN'S WWF TITLE LOSS TO ANDRE, NBC, MAIN EVENT, 184.

3RD: MIDNIGHTS-O.M.E. & CORNETTE'S JUICING, TBS/NWA, 166.

This could have been an angle, an event, or a situation that stood out in your mind over the course of the year. I'm like you...when those two brothers stood nose to nose in that ring and argued over the Hogan finish, I thought I was dreaming. Seeing Hogan actually lose the WWF belt after four years (as Mike Roberts of Tulsa, Okla., says, "It was like the end of the world for the little Hulksters.") showed how powerful that February evening was on NBC. The strong fan impact registered on the sight of Cornette getting creamed is indicative to me the NWA is killing this feud too quickly.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Paul E. Dangerously's CWF "Midnight Rider" line (69), Gilbert-Pez Jr. angle (64), Liz Poffo's legs at SUMMER SLAM (56), Gordon Solie's ouster from PWIW (45), Jim Cornette's 11/12 TBS interview (40), Roddy Piper on Don Owen wrestling (20), Eddie Haskell-Cornette sketch on CLASH I (20), Luger-Windham win NWA tag belts (16), Savage win at WM4 (10), Hogan-Savage handshake after WM4 (9), Gilbert burns Lawler in CWF (9), Mystic's CWF black eye (5), World Class high card draw for Texas tag belts (5), Andre's fear of Damien, Steiner's act, Flair-Sting judging (3 each), Hayes-Kerry vs. Roberts-Gordy brawl (5), Solie's grin after kiss from female wrestler (2), Gilbert's line about Dusty being a "fat tub of goo," Gilbert-Dangerously attack Burrhead Jones, Jim Cornette in straight jacket at Bash, Barry's turn, Barry-Midnight Rider dressing room confrontation, Hogan-Bossman handcuff angle, Missy Hyatt's CWA trivia game, (all 1 each).

BEST TV BRAWL

WINNER: MIDNIGHT EXPRESS-FANTASTICS match, Clash I, 351.

2ND: GILBERT-LAWLER parking lot brawl, CWA, 256.

3RD: BRUISER BRODY-ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER, SCW, 96.

The four wrestlers involved in this category's winner would all be out of the industry if they maintained this pace every night. Incidentally, in case you've forgotten, the Fantastics were handed a Dusty DQ for an over-the-top loss in the match.

The Gilbert-Lawler confrontation swallowed up a full nine minutes on the CWA show and Lawler's crash through a parked car's windshield is still devastating to watch. I was heartened at the Brody-Abdullah vote as this was for an 11-minute post-match melee in Brody's final U.S. match, which I know many voters had to see on tape trades. A fitting tribute to a man who could do it the finest.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Horsemen-Luger parking lot, Clash II (84); Ken Wayne-Danny Davis, CWF, and Michael Hayes concert brawl, WCCW (80 each); Midnights-O.M.E. (25); Austin Idol-Gilbert-Willie B. Hert, CWF, and Terry Gordy-Hayes, WCCW (20 each); Mike Golden-Roddy Piper (16); Hayes & Kerry vs. Roberts & Gordy (21); Jake Roberts-Rick Rude (12); Biff Wellington brawl, Stampede (3); Brody-John Nord, Windy City, Tommy Rich-Abdullah, WWC, and Tom Prichard-Tony Anthony bottle brawl, CWF (1 each).

BEST TV WRESTLING SHOW

WINNER: WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING, 236.

2ND: CWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 164

3RD: CONTINENTAL WRESTLING FEDERATION, 144.

Roger Richards of Tampa, Fla., reflected the views of many readers when he said: "It's not that Vince McMahon puts on the best wrestling. It's just hard to argue with his production values." The time and effort placed into post-production genuinely shows. Had the Memphis show been able to retain the pace of its first quarter with the Gilberts/Missy Hyatt escapades, perhaps it would have ranked closer to the top. The drop in talent quality and the overbearing quality of Robert Fuller's Stud Stable obviously weakened the CWA's strength.

There is no doubt in my mind Continental would have taken the trophy had it maintained the momentum of the spring and summer Eddie Gilbert excitement which had the entire nation talking. In fact, many MATWATCHers cast first place votes for the CWF regardless. But the downswing in talent and pacing after October was unmistakable.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, TBS (132); NWA MAIN EVENT (68...many voting for its early weeks); WWF PRIME TIME, USA (64); STAMPEDE (61); NWA PRO (33); CHICAGO CHAMPIONSHIP (24); WORLD CLASS (23); WWC (20); PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK (16); PORTLAND, BOB LUCE, WWF CHALLENGE (9 each); WWF SNME (5); TBS A.M. (3); NWA WORLD WIDE, AWA/ESPN (2 each); SCW, WCCW LEGENDS, WWF ALL-AMERICAN, NWF (1 each).

BEST TURN

WINNER: BARRY WINDHAM, NWA, 348.

2ND: RICK STEINER, NWA, 248.

3RD: ROAD WARRIORS, NWA, 195.

With eleven turns during 1988 (actually 12 if you count the semi-double turn of Steve Williams), it was hard for the NWA not to score heavily in this category. No doubt the Windham turn on Lex Luger was the best-executed of the year because it bore the complete element of surprise, coming only three weeks after their NWA world tag team title win. In the case of Steiner, the turn

was inevitable for seven fall weeks but readers appeared to enjoy the comedy of Steiner making life miserable for Gamesmaster Kevin Sullivan. The Road Warriors' turn, likewise, was telegraphed by the shaving of Paul Ellering's hair and a distinct heel twist in Hawk's and Animal's interviews but the actual attack on Sting was one of the well-choreographed segments of the year.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Rougeau Brothers, WWF (160); Midnight Express, NWA (49); Ronnie Garvin, NWA (41); Tommy Rich, SCW (40); Hercules Hernandez, WWF (8).

RISING TV STAR OF THE YEAR

WINNER: RICK STEINER, NWA, 368.
 2ND: STING, NWA, 316.
 3RD: PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY, NWA, 152.

Steiner's hot final quarter obviously put him over the top in this category, even though he hadn't won the NWA TV title as we voted. Had Sting been allowed to capitalize on the momentum from his CLASH I main event, no doubt he would have rolled to victory but being mired in meaningless tag situations in the final quarter reduced his voting strength. Dangerously's departure from the CWF for the NWA only underscored his momentum as his first appearance on TBS cemented his Miami Vice villainry as a power for the '90s.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Ultimate Warrior, WWF (92); Blue Blazer, WWF (76); Samoan Swat Team, WCCW (44); Badd Company, AWA (28); Eddie Gilbert, CWA/CWF/NWA (24); Rougeaus, WWF (1); Derrick Dukes, AWA (1).

BEST OVERALL TV PERSONALITY

WINNER: JIM CORNETTE, NWA, 336.
 2ND: PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY, NWA, 172.
 3RD: RIC FLAIR, NWA, 160.

Even though this is a mail-in poll, can there be any doubt who the one-two characters are in overall television talent in

this industry? Cornette had, indeed, the most difficult job in having to adapt what had been a tailor-made heel irritant to a babyface capable of retaining heat and maintaining the comedy level of what made him originally popular. He has succeeded brilliantly.

In the case of Dangerously, his is a more brutal villainry from a verbal sense but his tube persona engenders hate almost from the moment he appears. Plus, he has proved his past success in smaller promotions was no fluke.

The past master, Ric Flair, still has plenty in him, although his weekly NWA interviews followed more predictable patterns, which may be freshened with a babyface turn in '89.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Jesse Ventura, WWF (132); Ted DiBiase, WWF (100); Eddie Gilbert, CWA/CWF/NWA (52); Jim Ross, NWA (33); Lance Russell, CWA (16); Missy Hyatt, CWA/CWF/NWA (9); Hulk Hogan, WWF (5); Bill Mercer, Wild West (3); Rick Steiner, NWA; Buddy Rose, Portland; Michael Hayes, NWA/WCCW/SCW; Rougeaus, WWF; Randy Savage, WWF; Scotty the Body, FCW/CWA (1 each).

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT (For Areas Not Covered in Other Categories)

WINNER: EDDIE GILBERT, For Role as CWF Booker.

For a category where only one vote was asked, Eddie's success ---albeit short-lived---in regenerating interest in an all but terminated promotion easily took the honors over Jerry Lawler's revival of the AWA title with 52 votes. The MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR may well be contributing creative influence in the revamped NWA in the coming year, at least in his own angles.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Lawler (32); Vince McMahon, for maintaining WWF dominance (24); Ted Turner, for buying the NWA (13); Joe Pedicino, for PWTW (3); Kerry Von Erich (1).

OPINION QUESTION: Who would you prefer to see become NWA booker?

RESULTS: Bill Watts (77), Eddie Gilbert (25), Jim Cornette (13), Ole Anderson (8), Ric Flair (4), Dusty Rhodes (1).

Readers who long for the action-oriented days of the old Universal Wrestling Federation overwhelmingly lobbied for the return of Watts, who reportedly at this writing has reversed his field and would be willing to make himself available for the role after two successful years in private business in Florida. Whether NWA executive vice president Jim Herd will entertain the notion is another story.

Gilbert's track record with the CWF has been documented but several readers questioned whether Gilbert is too young to have an impact with veterans such as Flair and the uncertain Rhodes.

Surprisingly, Cornette, who was not listed as a ballot choice was written in as the choice of 13 voters. MATWATCH editorialized in November for Cornette as an assistant booker in the NWA.

WORST OF... CATEGORIES

BROADCAST TV MATCH

WINNER: BARON VON RASCHKE VS. SOLDAD USTINOV, AWA, 348.

2ND: DINO BRAVO VS. KEN PATERA, WWF/PPV, 268.

3RD: KEVIN SULLIVAN VS. BIG BEAR COLLIE, NWA MAIN EVENT, 128.

MATWATCHers apparently want to remember this AWA bomb about as long as the Baron's career lasted as manager of the Powers of Pain. Patera, who also lands in the big three of the next category has apparently crossed St. Peter's gates in his career, as has the much over-pushed Bravo. Any Big Bear Collie match is bad enough--- but I'd like to know the true thoughts of Tony Schiavone and Jim Ross when they had to watch this one FOUR times on NWA MAIN EVENT.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Hulk Hogan vs. Boris Zhukov, WWF (112); Mr. Big handicap match, WATL Wrestlethon (56); Dusty Rhodes vs. Bobby Eaton U.S. title match, WORLDWIDE (44); Mr. Wrestling II vs. Buck Robley, SCW (29); Junkyard Dog Paris match, USA (25); Jerry Lawler vs. Tiejho Khan, ESPN (24); Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan, WM4 (24); Sgt. Slaughter-Soldad Ustinov, ESPN; Rufus R. Jones-Tony Falk, WWC (20 each); Von Raschke vs. Curt Hennig, ESPN (16); Phil Hickerson

vs. Nature's Best, CWA (12); Andre vs. Randy Savage, SNME (5); Kerry Von Erich vs. Tatsumi Fujinami (3); Midnight Rider vs. David Isley, NWA PRO (1).

CABLE/PPV MATCH

WINNER: ULTIMATE WARRIOR VS. HERCULES HERNANDEZ, WM4, 340.
 2ND: ULTIMATE WARRIOR VS. HONKY TONK MAN, SUMMER SLAM, 256.
 3RD: BAD NEWS BROWN VS. KEN PATERA, SUMMER SLAM, 184.

He may be the hottest star in the WWF but MATWATCHers are not amused at the Anabolic one's ring talents. As Tim Henderson of Louisville, Ky., writes: "I wish they'd electrically charge the ropes when he shakes them." Not much can be said of Brown-Patera, although one reader countered an opinion that it was "a well-worked match." No matter, it's a WWF sweep here.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Nikita Koloff vs. Bobby Eaton, BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE (116); BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE finals (108); Rick Rude vs. Jake Roberts, WM4 (60); Junkyard Dog vs. Andre the Giant (24); Jim Duggan first-round match at WM4 (20); Hogan vs. Andre, WM4 (3); Dusty Rhodes vs. Barry Windham, BASH, and Triple Tower of Doom, BASH (1 each).

WORST NEW CHARACTER

WINNER: AKEEM, WWF, 228.
 2ND: RED ROOSTER, WWF, 196.
 3RD: HIGH CHIEF AFI, 140.

In all fairness, the promotion which introduces the most original characterizations is going to take the most hits from critical fans and no promotion has ever been driven by character to the degree of the WWF. Bill Curtis of Gary, Indiana, writes: "Akeem is obscene!" The transformation into an African "dream," another offhanded slap at Dusty Rhodes, has been one of the worst putdowns yet of minorities. The Red Rooster is approaching extinction as of this writing with Terry Taylor's impending turn on Bobby Heenan after an embarrassing four months. Sivi Afi's role as a chieftain was, mercifully, dropped by Titan after only six weeks of Afi masquerading as a multi-tattooed Peter Maivia-like character.

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Midnight Rider, NWA (136); King Haku, WWF (124); Diamond Dallas Pages, AWA (80); Blue Blazer, WWF (45); Cruel Connection, NWA (37); Dustin Rhodes, NWA (28); Russian A's, NWA (21); Brother Love, WWF, and Ultimate Warrior, WWF (20 each); Blackstud Williams, OWF (16); Super Black Ninja, WCCW (3); Black Stud, SCW, Iron Priest, FCW, Comrade Busich, SCW, Dino Bravo, WWF, Mighty Thor, and Rocky Mountain Thunder, AWA (1 each).

WORST SUPERCARD

TIE: WWF SUMMER SLAM, NWA
BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE (44 each)

In somewhat of a surprise to me, the aura of the Hogan-Savage vs. DiBiase-Andre matchup with the Elizabeth Poffo semi-strip to distract the "Megabucks'" attention did not register that warmly with readers. The mere repeat victory of Dusty Rhodes was enough to turn fans off of the January Crockett PPV.

OTHERS: Wrestlemania IV, WWF (40); Royal Rumble, WWF (7).

WORST COLOR ANNOUNCER

WINNER: Billy Graham, WWF, 472.
2ND: David Crockett, NWA, 276.
3RD: Verne Gagne, AWA, 148.

As Mark Clark of Phenix City, AL, writes: "I don't ever want to hear the word 'bruh-thuh' again!" Perhaps there's a correlation in viewer reaction to WWF SUMMER SLAM to the PPV color man, Mr. Graham. As for David, he manages the most dubious triple crown in these awards, as you'll see soon. At least eleven voters called Verne a form of "ol' senile," some which can't be printed.

OTHERS: Steve Williams, NWA (144), Rhubarb Jones, SCW (96), Bob Roop, Global (36), Missy Hyatt, CWF, Harvey Martin, WCCW, and Donna Gagne, AWA (3 each); Jonard Solie, FCW, and Al Hayes, WWF (1 each).

WORST TV PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

WINNER: DAVID CROCKETT, NWA, 320.
2ND: ROD TRONGARD, AWA/WWF, 248.
3RD: MARC LOWRANCE, WCCW, 244.

There was no doubt in my mind how this would finish---only the margin of victory. In all honesty, announcers such as Nick Patrick probably would have fared "worse" had their shows aired in more of the U.S. But MATWATCHers leave little doubt as to their feelings on David. As newspaper columnist Richard Hyatt says: "You'll know TBS is serious about wrestling when they get rid of David."

OTHERS: Ed Whalen, Stampede (113); Bill Mercer, Wild West (112); Sean Mooney, WWF (80); Gorilla Monsoon, WWF (32); Nick Patrick, Deep South (32); Lord Al Hayes, WWF (20); Tony Schiavone, NWA, and Larry Nelson, AWA (3 each); Charlie Platt, CWF (1).

WORST TURN

WINNER: Steve Williams, NWA, 236.
2ND: Eddie Gilbert, NWA, 225.
3RD: Powers of Pain, WWF, 216.

As a close associate of mine recently said: "There's still no explicable reason why Steve Williams joined the Varsity Club." If he was to become a heel, the reasoning should have been more focused.

As for Eddie, a number of readers believe his most effective work is as a heel. In the P.O.P. case, Dave Meltzer put it this way: "The Powers of Pain have to go down as one of the worst-executed moves of the year. All that talk about

WORST TV ANGLE

WINNER: FRITZ VON ERICH Heart Attack, WCCW, 349.
 2ND: AKEEM Is Born, WWF, 264.
 3RD: DINO BRAVO Weightlifting, WWF, 148.

J.D. McKay of RINGSIDE REFLECTOR offered a contrasting view to the overwhelming numbers who found the Fritz bit offensive. J.D.: "If Watts had done the same thing, people would be saying it was great." In its parody of minorities, I view AKEEM as perhaps the most offensive angle Vince has ever done. Even though Bravo has skill with the weights, the credibility of him "lifting" 715 pounds at the ROYAL RUMBLE didn't even register with most of the casual fans.

OTHERS: Terry Taylor as Red Rooster, WWF (124); Midnight Rider at the campfire, NWA (52); Stud Stable watermelon, CWA (40); Bobby Fulton in straightjacket, NWA (40) Andre/snake fear (20); Theft of Mathilda, WWF, and Anabolic Warrior as I-C champ, WWF (5 each); Baby Doll pictures, NWA, and Honky Tonk Man/Beefcake exchanges (3 each); Ed Whalen-Steve DiSalvo-Makhan Singh angle, Stampede (3 each); Hogan/Bossman Bro. Love segment, WWF (2); Beauty & the Beast debut, CWA, and Verne G. suspending himself from TV, AWA (1 each).

WORST MUSIC

WINNER: (TIE) NWA CATCH THE PINFALLS and "BAM BAM" BIGELOW theme, 228.
 3RD: RUSSIAN A'S theme, 176.

Kind of an innocuous category but I hope the Turner people get a more pleasing tune for their syndicated promotion music. At least five readers castigated the NWA for their lack of imagination with the "generic" Bigelow theme.

them being like The Road Warriors has just died."

OTHERS: Ronnie Garvin, NWA (160), Dick Murdoch, NWA (120), Ray Candy, SCW (28), Jim Cornette, NWA (20), Demolition, WWF (5), Sheepherders, WWF (5), Eric Embry, WCCW, Hart Foundation, WWF, Terminators, Windy City, and Chic Donovan, SCW (1 each).

DECLINING STAR(S) OF THE YEAR

WINNER: ROCK & ROLL EXPRESS, NWA/CWA/AWA/SCW, 324.
 2ND: GREG VALENTINE, WWF, 172.
 3RD: HULK HOGAN, WWF, 168.

I honestly didn't realize how far down the ladder the R&R had fallen in fan perception until this vote. After their NWA return ended in abortion, I have serious doubts if this pair can regenerate their once-dominant act.

The interesting aspect of Valentine to me still is that Dusty tried to return him to the NWA as a Horseman. But Greg has looked old this year.

No ifs and or buts, Hogan will be WWF champion again this April but unless his "biographical" movie hits big this spring, I don't think this reign will duplicate 1984.

OTHERS: British Bulldogs, WWF (148); Brad Armstrong/Tim Horner, NWA (128); Kevin Von Erich, WCCW (72); Jimmy Valiant, NWA/CWA/AWA (52); Al Madril, WCCW/Portland (32); Don Muraco, WWF (16); Larry Zbyszko, NWA (5); Ken Patera, WWF (5); Nikita Koloff, NWA, Dusty Rhodes, NWA, Iron Sheik (various), Mathilda, WWF (3 each); Billy Jack Haynes, WWF/OWF, Owen Hart, WWF, Sam Houston, WWF, Andre the Giant, WWF (1 each).

Tony Schiavone's & Jim Ross' cackles about "The Kremlin's Greatest Hits" were at least one organization's efforts to lampoon itself.

OTHERS: AWA Theme (148), Haku Theme and Hulk Hogan Theme (36 each), Lex Luger theme (24), SCW Theme and Brutus Beefcake theme (20 each), Eddie Gilbert NWA theme (19), Sting theme, Bro. Love theme, Midnight Express generic theme, Young Stallions theme, New PWTW theme, (5 each); Rockers theme, Koko B. Ware theme, Volkoff Russian anthem, Rock & Roll Express theme (3 each); Ultimate Warrior theme, Fantastics theme, P.O.P. theme, Randy Savage "Pomp & Circumstance," JYD theme (1 each).

WORST IDEA OF THE YEAR

WINNER: 4 HORSEMEN VITAMINS, 288.
 2ND: MIDNIGHT RIDER, NWA, 256.
 3RD: MARYLAND STATE ATHLETIC.COMM. FINISH AT BASH, NWA, 161.

The NWA sweep indicates how many ideas backfired on the Crockett organization in 1988. I still think the FDA ought to investigate what was in the vitamins (no, I didn't buy any).

The Rider's 900-fan turnout in NWA stronghold Charlotte was enough to cement his tombstone.

Maybe the Bash anger at the Luger loss for a shaving nick wouldn't have been so heated if the NWA had executed as the AWA did at SUPER CLASH and if it had not been another Dusty screw job.

OTHERS: Akeem (116), Lawler-Kerry unification series (72), WM4 at Trump Tower (44), WM4 tournament (40), NWA Triple Tower of Doom (32), PWTW as half-hour and Iceman Parsons as WCCW champ (28 each), NWA keeping Dusty (32), Jose Gonzales wrestling on WWC card after Brody

murder, Billy Jack Haynes' OWF promotion, Ultimate Warrior as I-C champ, Fritz Von Erich "heart attack" (5 each); SUPERCLASH III (3); Kevin Von Erich still competing (3); AWA movie star interviews (3); Crockett interviews, NWA New York debacle, finish to BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE, The Big K on the AWA (1 each).

NOTES ON BALLOTING

The balloting covered a period from December 1, 1987, to November 30, 1988. Votes were counted on a 5-3-1 point basis for first, second, and third.

The voting was limited to programs and performers on wrestling TV series seen predominantly in North America. Stampede Wrestling and WWC (Caribbean) were included because at least portions of Continental U.S. markets can view these programs.

In the TURN categories, a "turn" was defined to include a change of image for a wrestler if such change occurred simply by his changing organizations (i.e., Eddie Gilbert entering the NWA as a babyface after his CWF heel stint).

In the play-by-play and color announcers categories, an announcer was considered eligible if he made as few as one appearance in either role. Hence, Roddy Piper---who only appeared once as a color commentator in Portland---was considered eligible.

A total of 147 ballots were returned but in some categories, fans chose to cast no votes.

The final two categories: WORST SHOW and WORST TV PERSONALITY are listed on the following page.

WORST TV SHOW

WINNER: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, TBS, 169 1/3.
 2ND: AWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, ESPN/SYND., 164.
 3RD: NWA MAIN EVENT, TBS/SYND., 157.

Isn't it ironic that the wrestling organization which has the more favored personalities is considered to have two of the most unfortunate shows. As my colleague Meltzer and I have agreed, there are worse shows than the WCW two hours but the squash/interview format has squandered the flagship promotional spot of any organization. But with major improvements in presentation and production coming, don't bet on WCW winning this honor next year.

The AWA's rapidly-deteriorating talent base and erratic ESPN scheduling and the combination of Rod Trongard and Verne Gagne have solidified this group's show among TV's worst.

Nothing more need be said about NWA MAIN EVENT. What started in its early weeks as perhaps America's answer to the Japan formats has flamed in a sea of disappointment but should rebound in '89.

OTHERS: WCCW (108), TBS (A.M.) 101, Deep South (88 1/3), ICW (64), WWF All-American (52 1/3), WWF Spotlight (44), WWF Challenge (40), Southern Championship (32), NWF (20), WWF Superstars (8), USA Championship, IWF/Tempo, Tomko, IWA (5 each), PWTW, NWA Pro, FLAIR, Pro Wrestling America (3 each), NWA World Wide (2), Global, GLOW, POWW, Chicago Championship, WWC (1 each).

WORST TV PERSONALITY

WINNER: DAVID CROCKETT, NWA, 280.
 2ND: ULTIMATE WARRIOR, WWF, 189
 3RD: ROD TRONGARD, AWA/WWF, 100.

The dubious winner of the McLEAN STEVENSON AWARD for futility is a veteran of 16 years in the broadcasting business and still is being told by a new generation, such as Paul E. Dangerously, that he needs a course in Broadcasting 101.

Whether you know him as Anabolic or the Ultimate Dingbat, the WWF star who has the under-12s popping is considered by, among others, Carla Jones of Greenwich CT "the most uncommunicative one individual in the history of professional wrestling."

Just as we thought Vince McMahon had committed all of the ultimate sins possible, he picks up Trongard as a regional cable announcer. But Frenchy Martin, whose purpose I'm yet to determine, nearly outdueled Rod for the second runner-up slot.

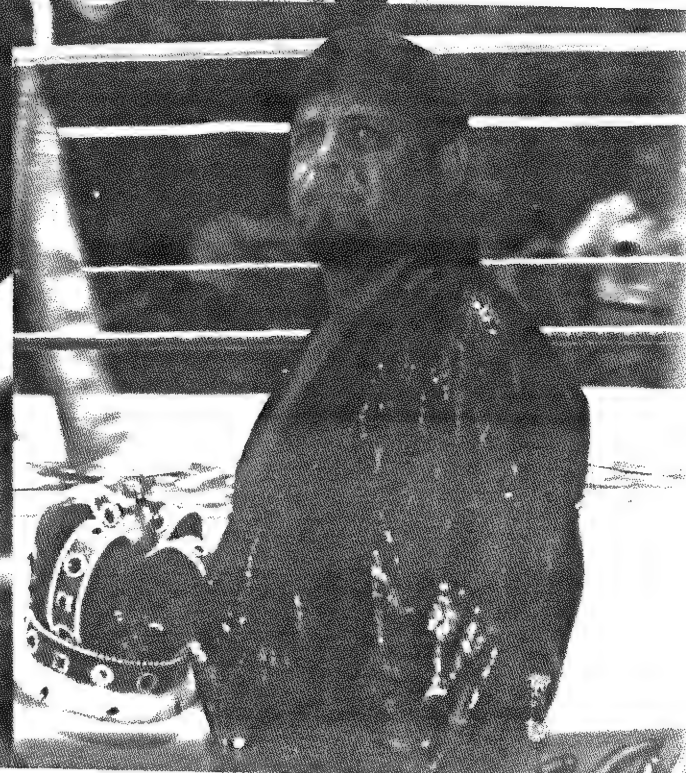
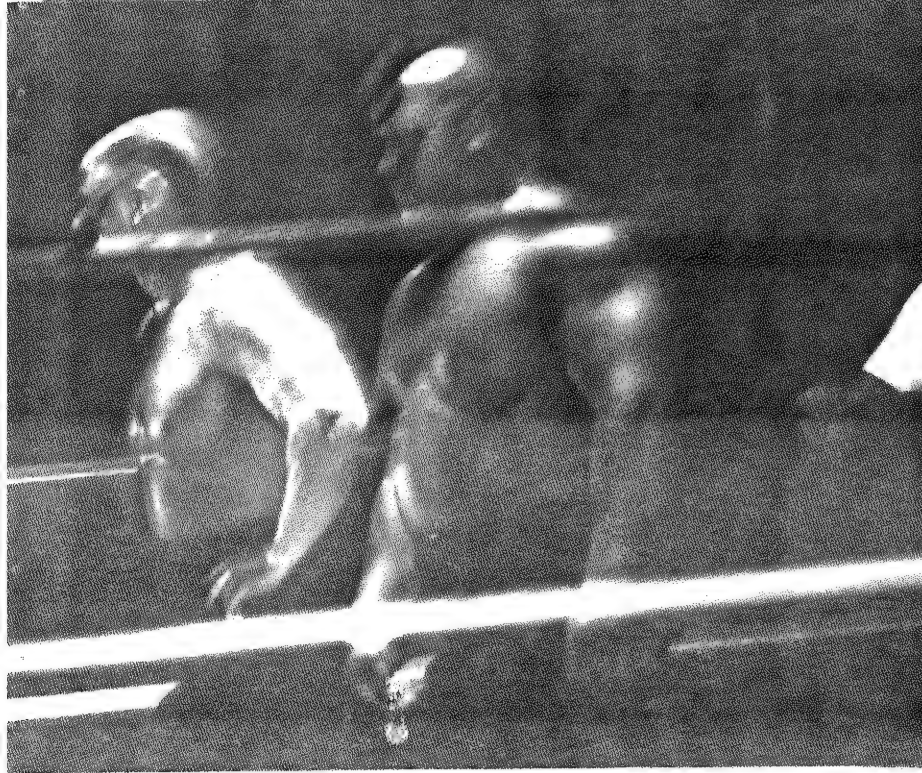
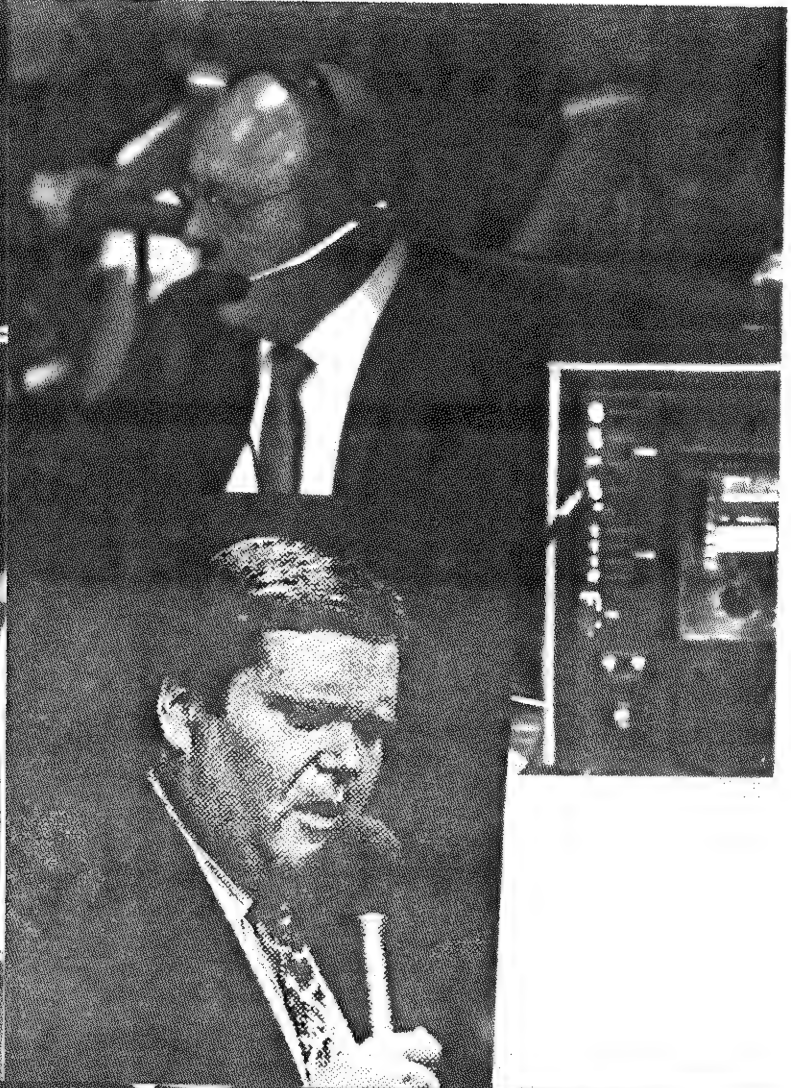
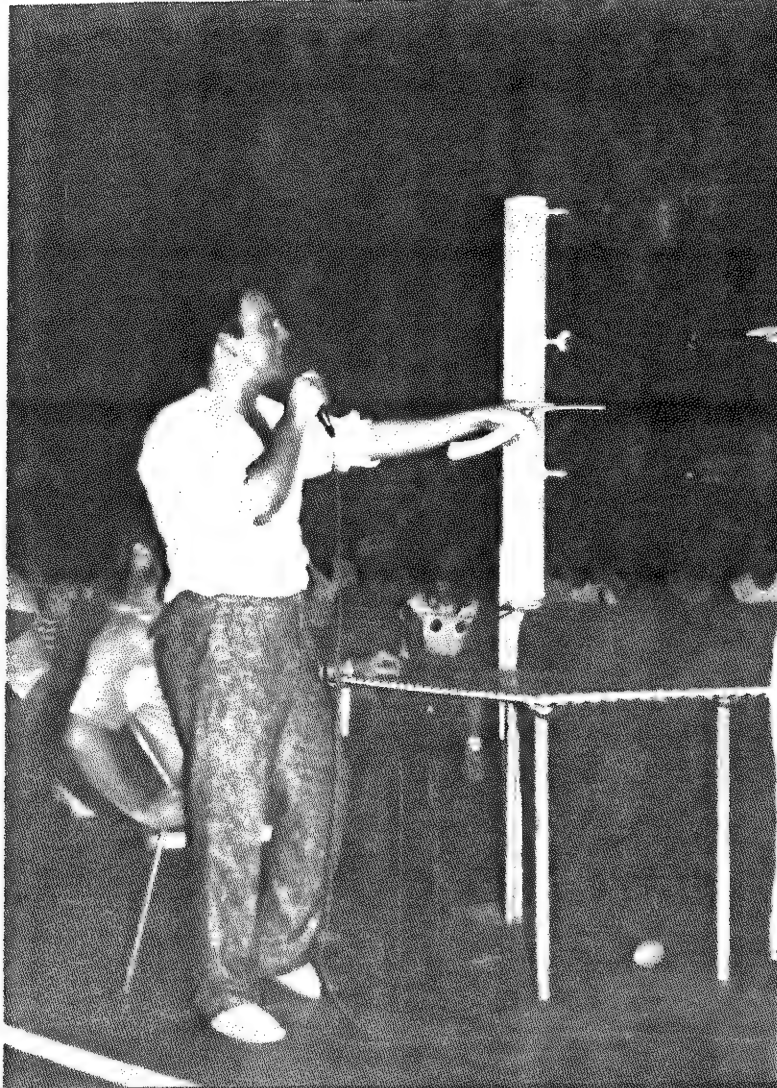
OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES: Frenchy Martin, WWF (92); Robert Gibson, AWA/NWA/SCW/CWA (60); Gorilla Monsoon, WWF, and Ed Whalen, Stampede (44 each); Ricky Morton (various) (40); Paul Jones, NWA (32); Verne Gagne, AWA (28); Hulk Hogan, WWF (24); Jim Crockett, NWA, and Billy Graham, WWF (16 each); Dusty Rhodes, NWA, Oliver Humperdink, WWF/NWA, Harvey Martin, WCCW, Mr. Fuji, WWF (5 each); Nikita Koloff, NWA, Bunkhouse Brown, CWA, Ray Candy (various), Kevin Von Erich, WCCW, Larry Nelson, AWA, Marc Lowrance, WCCW (3 each); Brother Love, WWF (2); Nick Patrick, Deep South, Brutus Beefcake, WWF, Gene Okerlund, WWF, Ernie Ladd (?), Steve Williams, NWA, and Baron Von Raschke, AWA/WWF (1 each).

MANY, MANY THANKS TO ALL OF YOU WHO TOOK THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS BALLOTING WHEN YOU ARE LIKEWISE ASKED TO DO THE SAME BY MANY OTHER FINE NEWSLETTER EDITORS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

I HOPE EVERYONE REALIZES THAT LIKE IN ANY OTHER MAIL-IN POLLS, THE RESULTS ARE TOTALLY UNSCIENTIFIC, CERTAINLY DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWPOINTS OF ALL WRESTLING FANS IN THIS COUNTRY, AND ARE STRICTLY TO GIVE READERS OF MATWATCH AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN A COMPREHENSIVE FASHION.

HOPEFULLY, HOWEVER, THIS POLL CAN BE ONE BAROMETER FOR EXECUTIVES IN SOME WRESTLING ORGANIZATIONS WHO READ THIS PUBLICATION (AND THERE ARE SEVERAL PAYING SUBSCRIBERS IN POSITIONS OF KEY RESPONSIBILITY IN AT LEAST THREE GROUPS) TO GAUGE WHETHER THEIR TRENDS AND PERSONALITY IDEAS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED IN A PROPER FASHION IN THE PAST YEAR.

BUT A FINAL NOTE TO YOU WHO VOTED: JUST BECAUSE SOME OF YOUR SELECTIONS DID NOT MATCH THE MAJORITY OF READERS (and you saw my ballot in December...some of mine didn't either) DOES NOT INDICATE THAT YOUR CHOICES ARE WRONG. CREATIVE PREFERENCES ARE RELATIVE AND REFLECT YOUR OWN PERSONAL TASTES. WHAT YOU DISLIKE MAY BE ANOTHER FAN'S JOY, SO TAKE HEART. THAT'S WHY WE HAVE PUBLICATIONS LIKE THIS...TO GIVE YOU AN EQUAL VOICE. AGAIN, I THANK YOU.



DANGEROUSLY, GAGNE, ROSS, ROAD WARRIORS, LAWLER GET BIG VOTES
All Among Top Vote Getters in MATWATCH TV Awards Poll
(Photos by Dennis Brent, Steve Bryant)

TALES FROM THE DUSTY UNIVERSE

POTSHOT

© FBO by Bill Kunkel



BILL KUNKEL, Author of TALES OF THE DUSTY UNIVERSE and other comics seen in this publication and the holiday double issue of MATWATCH, edits his own bulletin, ANGLE. A forthcoming edition of MATWATCH explains Bill's ANGLE RATING SYSTEM of professional wrestling, a subject which has engendered much recent discussion in THE WRESTLING OBSERVER and other newsletters.

My personal thanks to Bill, a talented cartoonist, for his time and effort into his comics for this annual.

LINES OF THE YEAR AND FRIENDS

While 1988 may have been a blah year in totality for pro wrestling, some gifted personalities did keep our lives enriched with some classic comments. I am especially pleased so many of you have made mention that LINES OF THE WEEK is among your favorite MATWATCH segments. It's one of mine, too, so for THE ANNUAL BEYOND, I've chosen my ten favorite lines of 1988, plus the best of some of our other weekly categories.

TOP LINE / PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY:

"If you suspend us, then we're just going to follow everyone else's lead and Hot Stuff Eddie Gilbert will come right back in here as the Midnight Rider!"

JOE PEDICINO: "I don't believe crap like that will be tolerated in the CWF."

Talk about the element of surprise: this was probably the most direct lampoon of a failed angle I've seen one group do of another in years. It was the one exchange that had me in stitches for a half-hour after it aired.

2. DUSTY RHODES, NWA: "There ain't a steroid in this body, baby."

Talk about the good, the bad and the obvious....this was like saying Tang tastes orange.

3. JESSE VENTURA, WWF: "This is horrible, Gorilla!"

The most unintentionally correct line of the year, Jesse was describing the Hulk Hogan interference which won Randy Savage the WWF belt but was more of a comment on the entire WRESTLEMANIA IV show.

4. IRV MUCHNICK, Fox LATE SHOW: "Pro wrestling is kinda like Jim & Tammy Bakker with a dropkick."

At least Irv was thinking analogically. The comment came during an interview in regard to the Muchnick expose on the Von Erich family in PENTHOUSE Magazine.

5. JIM CORNETTE, NWA: "I could go through J. J. Dillon just like Ex-Lax goes through a widder woman."

If Cornette writes his own material, he is one of the nation's most undiscovered comic geniuses.

6. ROAD WARRIOR HAWK, NWA: "Some people spike drinks. We spike Dreams!"

Hawk didn't lose his sense of humor when he turned heel.

7. JIM ROSS, NWA: "That's Paul E. Dangerously...and that's Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose. They don't even work in the NWA."

Probably the best "selling" line of 1988 to introduce a new team to a circuit. The line was inspired because few promotions even acknowledge the prior existence of teams from other groups.

8. ARN ANDERSON, WWF: "We are the cement of an already profound dynasty."

Not sure here if Arn was slapping his former employer in the mouth or praising Vince. Maybe both. But it had a punch.

9. CORNETTE, NWA PRO: "When they stripped Ben Johnson of his gold medals, he said, 'Hey, son! I didn't take no stereotypes!'"

You could take this one any way you want but I showed this people who aren't even wrestling fans and they doubled over.

10. (tie) MAKHAN SINGH, Stampede, in answer to Ed Whalen's question on what the worst move is in pro wrestling: "Whoever made you play-by-play announcer."

DANGEROUSLY, NWA: "David, we all know why you're here...but tell me something, Tony, who are you related to?"

The two top announcer insults of the year and both came from nowhere. I'll bet David wasn't grinning through Paul E.'s.

BEST PICTURES

1. NBC, for closeup of the two Hebner brothers arguing. It was as good as Billy Martin and an American League umpire. 2. FLORIDA, for closeup of Gordon Solie after being kissed by Crystal Sky. Solie's grin was two miles wide and followed by the line, "Um, boy...got the old heart pumpin' again."

STRONGEST COMMENTS

1. DUSTY RHODES, TBS: "I AM TBS! I AM the NWA! I AM wrestling!" It also would have been perhaps the all-time arrogant line of any year. 2. RIC FLAIR, NWA: "Life for you

after the NFL, John Ayres, isn't in a wrestling ring." Jim Ross didn't miss by much with his followup, "John Ayres wasn't All-Pro in the NFL because of his public speaking ability."

BEST PROMO

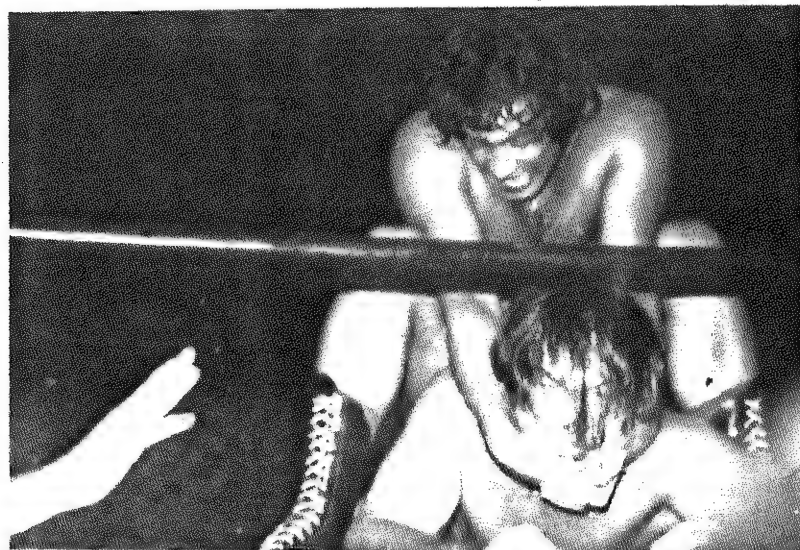
TBS, for Cornette SEASON'S BEATINGS spot. Cornette's "Night Before Christmas" parody and closing line of "Season's beatings to all...and to all, a good fight!" was an imaginative use of talent.

BOO AWARD OF THE YEAR

(Tie) ESPN, for its erratic scheduling of AWA Wrestling. Whether you like the circuit, you should be given a steady time period; and VERNE GAGNE, for not using Lance Russell on any of the ESPN tapings from Tennessee and Kentucky in the fall.



* * * M A T W A T C H M E M O R Y * * *



OLD FAVORITES: I want to share a nostalgic moment with you from Savannah, Ga., circa 1973. The top shot is one of my favorite action sequences as newly-crowned NWA world champion Jack Brisco applies a chinlock to one of the great contenders never to win the belt, Tim Woods. Jack won the match by countout in 41 minutes, one of several excellent bouts between the two. The lower shot is with Brisco at ease with a Georgia fan. Brisco and Woods were only too eager to share a few moments with spectators and I remember them for the many quality of hours of entertainment they produced.

DALLAS: A PARODY

In the Aug. 29 edition of MATWATCH, at a point when negotiations nearly broke off between Jim Crockett and Ted Turner and the NWA was almost canceled on SuperStation TBS, we offered a parody of one of America's longest-running soaps which isn't too far off from the saga of pro wrestling.

Because subscribership has increased sixfold since that edition, we reprint the parody, DALLAS: THE CROCKETT YEARS, in a lighthearted look at one of the year's top stories:

The board room of Ewing Oil (Jim Crockett Promotions) is filled with family members: J.R. (Jim Crockett Jr.), Bobby (David Crockett), Pam (Frances Crockett), Gary (Jack Crockett) and Miss Ellie (Mrs. Jim Crockett Sr.). On the wall hangs a picture of the imposing Jock (Jim Crockett Sr.) in a white cowboy hat, holding a tag team championship cup. The dire conversation begins:

J.R./JIM: We're in trouble.

BOBBY/DAVID: How's that?

J.R./JIM: Shut up, Bobby/David. This isn't World Wide Wrestling.

BOBBY/DAVID: You be careful how you talk to me, J.R./Jim. Remember, I'm the foremost wrestling announcer in the world. Why I could...

J.R./JIM: You wouldn't be in any place if you weren't a member of this family. Now let's get on with this...wait a minute. Pam/Frances, you're married to Bobby but you're supposed to be our sister. How can that be?

PAM/FRANCES: Don't worry about it, J.R./Jim. Nothing this family does ever makes sense.

J.R./JIM: Enough of that! We're all here to discuss the takeover of Jim Crockett Promotions.

GARY/JACK: I thought this was Ewing Oil.

J.R./JIM: For the rest of this meeting, we're calling this Jim Crockett Promotions...it's a code name. As you all know, Jeremy Wendell (Ted Turner) has made a bid to take us over. His company WrestStar wants to take the whole business in. I guess you know where that leaves us.

BOBBY/DAVID: But J.R./Jim, we did big business this past weekend in Norfolk, Richmond and Philadelphia.

PAM/FRANCES: Yeah, why do we need Jeremy/Ted to push us all out of a business we run so well?

J.R./JIM: Because we're broke! Don't you see it? Barney Rubble (Ronnie Garvin) just left us over the weekend.

BOBBY/DAVID: But he's on THE FLINTSTONES, J.R./Jim.

J.R./JIM: Shut up! The world keeps buzzing about this one leaving and that one...

PAM/FRANCES: J.R./Jim, why don't we see how the cartel feels about this? You know, the cartel (The Four Horsemen) have always been our bread and butter when we needed them.

J.R./JIM: That's a terrible idea! That cartel (Horsemen) has been about as stable as a crowd in a locked elevator. They couldn't hold onto Jordan Lee (Ole Anderson). Marilee Stone (Baby Doll) is long gone. Heck with 'em!

BOBBY/DAVID: Well, we haven't heard from GARY/JACK on this.

GARY/JACK: Well, I think you can all take the company and...

J.R./JIM: I don't care what you think. Daddy always knew you weren't going to amount to anything but a glorified cameraman. And you miss half the shots....

MISS ELLIE/MRS. JIM SR.: That's enough, J.R./Jim! I'll not have you talking that way in front of your father's picture. We're a family!

J.R./JIM: Mama, you stay out of this. My daddy always told me I'd be the one to make the decisions in this company.

BOBBY/DAVID: Yeah, J.R./Jim, and you've almost run our daddy's company out of business. It seems like we've had all the ideas here. WOWWWW! HEEYYYYY! So, what's your big answer? Sell out to Jeremy/Ted?

J.R./JIM: Yeah, Bobby/David. Maybe that isn't what Daddy would want but he also wouldn't want us to go bankrupt. That would make us the biggest blight on the state of Texas and maybe even the whole country, next to that idiot Cliff Barnes (Fritz Von Erich). Of course, maybe there is an alternative...

ALL: WHAT???

J.R./JIM: Well, I guess we're in such bad shape I'll have to tell you something only Mama knows.

MISS ELLIE/MRS. JIM SR.: J.R./Jim, NOOOO!

J.R./JIM: Mama, I'm sorry. But during the war, our Daddy had a fourth son. Now, he may have been a half-breed and he may not have the Ewing/Crockett name. But he may be our only hope...

BOBBY/DAVID: J.R./Jim, you're not talking about???

J.R./JIM: That's right, Bobby. I'm talking about Ray Krebbs (Dusty Rhodes). He's like a member of this family.

GARY/JACK: Speak for yourself!

(MIDNIGHT RIDER music begins playing in the office)

J.R./JIM: RAAAAAY, get in here!

(Ray/Dusty enters room on horse)

BOBBY/DAVID: Oh, get real, Jim/J.R.! This is the same guy who bopped you in the thorat with a baseball bat. This is the same Ray Krebbs/Dusty Rhodes who can't push the cattle any more because he spends too much time pushing himself. Even that guy down in Montgomery (Paul E. Dangerously) says he's going to bring back some guy named Gilbert as The Midnight Rider.

J.R./JIM: Hey, that's right! Didn't we have that guy working for us once in---what was the name of that company? U-W...F, was it? We don't talk about them any more.

RAY/DUSTY: That's riight. I had to run that group out of

beeeyuzness.

BOBBY/DAVID: Yeah, Dr. Death still wants a few words with you about that.

PAM/FRANCES: J.R./Jim, this is the stupidest thing I ever heard. You've always brought Ray/Dusty back in the 11th hour. This is the 13th hour. Why don't I just have a dream and we can tell everybody that's what it is---a dream---and we'll bring back The Freebirds, Hot Stuff, Chris Adams...it'll be great!

J.R./JIM: Pam/Frances, we can't do that. Dave Meltzer's already written that. It's not original. Besides, Meltzer's so negative, it's all HIS fault we're in this predicament.

RAY/DUSTY: How about Uvalde Slim? He's another good friend of mine. Our Daddy's friend Punk (Paul Boesch) can always get us off the hook if that doesn't work.

(At this point, the whole room begins a mass of verbal confusion when two figures suddenly enter the room.)

J.R./JIM: JEREMY/TED! I wasn't expecting to see you in Dallas.

JEREMY/TED: Ahhh...you won't see me here again...ahhhh...I just want you to know you have until....ahhh...Midnight Friday...ahhhh....to sell me this place or....ahhh....the deal's off.

SURPRISE VISITOR: I'll go you one better than that! (Slams fist on table and gets in Jim/J.R.'s face)

J.R./JIM: J.J. STARBUCK (Cowboy Bill Watts)??? Now, wait a minute. You're not even on our show or even our network.

STARBUCK/WATTS: That's right...it's Bill Watts, not J.J. Starbuck, to you and you don't need to worry about what network I'm on. (Gets in J.R./Jim's nose) The only network you need to worry about is The Wrestling Network because there ain't gonna be one if I don't get my three million dollars you owe me.

MISS ELLIE/MRS. JIM SR.: So, J.R./Jim? Those were those phone messages you didn't return...and this was the man you didn't see the last time he came to Dallas.

RAY/DUSTY: Hey, how about the Bunkhouse Stampede with me winning for the fourth straight year?

STARBUCK/WATTS: THREE MILLION DOLLARS!

WENDELL/TED: You've got til' Friday.

BOBBY/DAVID: HO-HO-HO-HO...we gotta go! Let MEEEE run the company.

MISS ELLIE/MRS. JIM SR.: J.R., I'm shocked at you!

(Suddenly, the lights flicker and dim and panic sets in...)

CRACK!! CRACK!! CRACK!!...the sound of apparent gunfire and....

Executive Producer
LEONARD KATZMAN

PROJECTIONS: 1989

I can remember no year in which so many people are bemoaning the state of pro wrestling, including myself. When 1988 began, could you have pictured Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson in the WWF? Jim Cornette and Eddie Gilbert babyfaces? Fritz Von Erich selling out? Verne Gagne doing a pay-cable show? The Ultimate Anabolic Dingbat Warrior as one of the most "over" performers in the USA? Bruiser Brody murdered? And so many independent promotions as dry as Death Valley?

As a brief windup, I wanted to share with you some projections for the final year of the '80s, many of which are based on television, and a bundle of which probably won't come to pass because of increasingly shifting tides in this business. Hang onto this and see how far off the mark I am when 1990 rolls around:

TELEVISION: I forecast a slow but steady drop in ratings for nationally syndicated wrestling shows. The WWF probably will wind up 1989 in the 8 range, rather than in the 9-10, as in most of '88. The Turner shows will probably pull a 5-6 unless their new wrestlers and format suddenly catches fire.

I foresee a strong possibility that both Verne Gagne and Don Owen will both leave the business---Owen's recent sacrificing of his Seattle time period is not a good sign. Gagne has virtually no talent left to promote on ESPN and no friends.

On the other hand, I believe the NWA will have at least a modest renaissance on TBS, though nowhere near the numbers the show did in the Gordon Solie years. If WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING can begin averaging in the 3-3.5 range, it will again be among the elite of cable TV offerings and that's not inconceivable if the Ricky Steamboat-Ric Flair rivalry rekindles its old fire, the Cornette-Dangerously feud keeps its freshness and a few more new faces can be brought in.

My guess is that Jerry Jarrett will hang in but it's going to be difficult to maintain a solid base because both the Texas and Memphis promotions have a regional taint to them and he really needs to repackage both into a new image with a fresh promotional name and strong

attention to the TV products. Plus, Lance Russell should be top announcer for all of Jarrett's shows.

My forecast for WWF/NBC shows indicates a so-so rating for the two prime time telecasts and a likely disaster for the SLAMMYS, which I do not think can hold its own with heavy network competition.

Sadly, I personally believe this may be the last year for PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK, one of my favorites because Joe Pedicino did what few people believed he could in making this a national show. But economics and a shrinking station lineup may force this one off.

Finally, I believe the underground home tape trading network will become even more important as I feel independent stations are going to continue to drop wrestling shows for lack of ratings and more variety. I think the day is over in MOST markets of 6-8 hours per week and I may be years, if ever, if we ever see that prospect again in non-cable homes.

PAY-PER-VIEW: No question here: we'll have two players in the game. And while I do not feel Vince McMahon's attempts to freeze Turner Home Entertainment out of the PPV game will work, I believe both promotions will suffer the fate of low-to-average buy-in percentages, except if a WRESTLEMANIA or STARRCADE shows signs of being a blowout show. I think both Turner and McMahon will be forced to admit that four PPV shows each are too many for the public to consume but neither will do so unless one takes the lead.

PROMOTIONS: I've stated my view, TV-wise, on the Owen and Gagne groups. It's not hard to project Mike Graham as ceding his Florida promotion, even if Dusty Rhodes comes in, because grown men can't survive on \$20-\$30 payoffs per night and cannot perform well while working second jobs.

I'd be genuinely surprised if Jerry Blackwell can hang in the entire year unless he can come up with enough angles to make his Southern independent appear a choice Atlanta alternative to the NWA. That's going to be increasingly tough, particularly with more NWA tapings in the Atlanta area.

The independent to watch this year will be Nelson Royal's ATLANTIC COAST WRESTLING in North Carolina. Can he pull off a regional effort in the old Crockett territory with a number of the NWA castoffs, including Nikita Koloff, The Rock & Roll Express, perhaps Jimmy

Valiant, Doug Sommers and several others working the independent circuit? Or will he genuinely try to develop new stars which this sport badly needs, even if he can't hold them longer than a year? Royal does know the business well but, again, the key is how well his TV gets over.

I'll go on a limb and predict that if Rhodes joins up with Graham in Florida and that effort fails, Dusty will attempt to start his own group. But I think he'll find it tough sledding because I don't think he can find enough guys willing to sacrifice the NWA or WWF payouts and, above everything, can Dusty originate a promotion that doesn't center around himself? But instinct and Dusty's ego suggest he'll try.

And don't forget that name lurking around like a dangerous pinch hitter in a dugout: Bill Watts. While Watts has avowed a renewed interest in the sport and would not deafen an NWA offer to book, he could draw quality guys who believe in him if he were to restart. The betting line says he won't return but some people bet the NWA and UWF would overtake McMahon.

PEOPLE: The NWA loggerhead will probably see some early names shaken out: Russian Assassins, Ivan Koloff, The Commandos, Randy Rose and possibly even Dennis Condrey are likely candidates. But the new recruits will be under pressure to produce in a fashion not previously demanded by the NWA. The guess here is that Jim Herd will settle on 30-36 players as his main team but will probably revive the concept of bringing in independents for one-shots (Terry Gordy, Japan stars, i.e.). Depending on how contracts are written, the NWA would probably be the most vulnerable to losing Lex Luger or even Sting---if he's not given a belt soon to the WWF, but then again, many of us felt that same danger last spring.

The year is starting in Titan with Ken Patera and Jim Brunzell out and a likelihood that Ron Bass will see his waning days soon. Frankly, I think if the Powers of Pain don't pick up steam with the switch to heels, they could be history before year's end. Tito Santana appears to be becoming a perennial but one wonders what else can be done with him. Koko Ware has to be on the edge, as well. I'm sure Vince is taking a strong look at Luger and Sting but a young guy like Sid Vicious in CWA appears to fill his bill and no one knows if and when Titan may offer Gordy enough to shake his Japan ties. At some point in time, though, I think the Russian angles have to be declared dead and the Volkoff/Zhukov team out of business.

In the CWF, some quality heels are badly needed because the Anthony/Stubbs combination has burned out...but good heels are hard to find. If Tom Prichard indeed bolts for the NWA, they better hope they can get lots of work from Gordy because there is no other definitive personality at this point around which that promotion can be built. The talent-sharing arrangement apparently reached with Jarrett is okay but I fear too much Fuller and Golden will bring back too many shades of the old Continental. In Verne's AWA, I predict a Don Muraco title reign will surely bomb and in World Class/CWA, what I see as a catalyst would be a Jerry Lawler turn to heel. But Lawler has some political aspirations in Memphis and one wonders if he will allow it before his retirement.

THE TITAN-TURNER WAR: At some point in time, I just have a sneaking suspicion Titan will try to strike again with a major live show on USA Cable opposite a Turner pay card, particularly if the NWA shows a resurgence. The cable operators don't want it and I don't even think the promotions genuinely do, but McMahon's ego may demand it.

Hulk Hogan will carry the WWF belt throughout the post-Wrestlemania V part of the year but who will Vince groom for a future champion? I'm sure that's being considered at this point because I don't see a second Hogan reign having nearly the longevity as his 1984-87 stint.

Turner can't allow the Flair-Steamboat hoopla to overshadow the need to develop more of their young stars, including a title for Sting. Otherwise, they will be guilty of similar sins to those of Mr. Runnels. It is a key to their becoming a serious player for the '90s.

If the NWA does surge, the Turner company will eventually have to sue to get into Madison Square Garden and several big-city arenas in which Titan maintains a monopoly. It is the only way they can underline the word MAJOR in their promo spots.

In short, I believe this is a year in which the two organizations will hold their own but I am convinced the NWA, if major mistakes are not made in presentation, format and television production, will begin to inch back into the ball game as a serious player, particularly if the Turner group develops a reputation for quality and treating its wrestlers as human beings.

THE DREAM EXPLAINS STARBURST 88
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ROCK

I

UNDERSTAND... WHEEZE... THAT SOME
OF THE LES-JEND'S FANS... HONK...
WANT TO KNOW HOW... GASP?... I WAS ABLE
TO FREE-DICT, IF YOU WHEEL, MY I INJURY...

WHEEEEEZE... AT THE
HANDS OF THE ROAD
WAR-REE-UHS...
GASP... BY TITLING
STARBURST "TRUE
GRITT"... HONK!...
SEVALL WEEKS
BE-FOW THE
INCIDENT, IF YOU
WHEEL... WHEEEEEZE...

HOW DID I KNOW?
GASP! WHEEEZE!

WHY, I HAD A DREE-UM!

QUESTION: WILL WE HAVE DUSTY RHODES TO KICK AROUND IN 1989?

(Cartoonist: Bill Kunkel)

FINAL WORDS FROM STEVE



When I set out to call this publication THE ANNUAL BEYOND...., my wife, who keeps me humble, said the only thing it was beyond is hope. She's probably right. But for the many of you I have talked with in this first year of MATWATCH, I wanted to share with you a few things about our lives.

The shot you see about is circa 1978 on the set of WTVM's ACTION 9 NEWS in Columbus, Ga. My co-anchor, Kathy Pepino, and I had just received one of our few positive rating reports.

My career in television news spanned 14 years, in addition to six in radio and I still keep my hand in broadcasting. In fact, I have a fantasy to announce a pro wrestling card for TV for one week. Rebecca wouldn't tolerate any more.

My love for the genre of pro wrestling began in 1966 when I saw Klondike Bill having a rock broken over his stomach on the old Gordon Solie show. I was hooked. Since then, I've had a chance to see Kiniski, Brisco, Funk, Bockwinkel, Race, Hansen, Thesz all the greats of the post-1965 era.

After graduation from the University of Georgia, I served a six-year stint in one of my two hometowns, Columbus, in television news before moving on to Spartanburg, S.C.'s WSPA and news director roles in both Savannah and Wilmington. But never did I lose my zest for my favorite weekend diversion and, at the risk of being looked on rather askance by my news staff who couldn't bear "that revolting mess," I trudged to every match I could find the time to attend.

When we came to Auburn University to head the Radio-TV service in 1986, we returned to our roots and my graduate research on TV & PRO WRESTLING: A MARRIAGE OF MAYHEM AND MEGABUCKS resulted in meeting many wonderful people associated with the sport and cultivating some important relationships.

Our decision to begin MATWATCH was made with a bit of trepidation because I honestly wasn't sure I could turn out a quality product every week. I'm still not sure. But a lot of you have been gracious enough to support us, to the point that I hope we can seriously improve upon the product in the next year. Our main thrust has been not to be as much the insider as to provide you with a television critic's-eye view of pro wrestling and carve out a specialized niche in helping you follow the sport week after week.

We hope to have the chance to talk to more of you in the coming year. One of the reasons I have always enjoyed pro wrestling is that the people who follow it do not care which economic background is yours, what kind of clothes you wear, or where you bought your car, they only ask you to be yourself. Plus, I simply like people and I feel fortunate to have cultivated many wonderful new friends, though many of you are in voice only.

My deepest thanks in this issue to Dennis Brent, Steve Bryant (whose pictures are available by writing Steve at 423 Sherwood Drive, Tullahoma TN 37388) and John Lanigan for their kindness in sharing photographs; and to Bill Kunkel for his excellent comics and cartoons.

Plus, my thanks to Rebecca for a lot of patience while I have written this, and to all of the wrestlers and executives who have served to provide the material week after week for a modest journalistic effort called MATWATCH. God bless all of you until the next pinfall.